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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

ARMADALE.

BY

WILKIE COLLINS

AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," ETC.

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CONTENTS

OF VOLUME III.

BOOK THE THIRD.
(*Continued.*)

Page

CHAPTER XI. Love and Law 1
— XII. A Scandal at the Station 15
— XIII. An Old Man's Heart 27
— XIV. Miss Gwilt's Diary 52
— XV. The Wedding Day 100

BOOK THE FOURTH.

— I. Miss Gwilt's Diary 143
— II. The Diary Continued 160
— III. The Diary Broken off 192

BOOK THE LAST.

— I. At the Terminus 250
— II. In the House 259
— III. The Purple Flask 274

EPILOGUE.

		Page
CHAPTER I.	News from Norfolk	334
— II.	Midwinter	341
	Note by Author	345

ARMADALE.

BOOK THE THIRD.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XI.

Love and Law.

On the morning of Monday, the twenty-eighth of July, Miss Gwilt — once more on the watch for Allan and Neelie — reached her customary post of observation in the park, by the usual roundabout way.

She was a little surprised to find Neelie alone at the place of meeting. She was more seriously astonished, when the tardy Allan made his appearance ten minutes later, to see him mounting the side of the dell, with a large volume under his arm, and to hear him say, as an apology for being late, that "he had muddled away his time in hunting for the Books; and that he had only found one, after all, which seemed in the least likely to repay either Neelie or himself for the trouble of looking into it."

If Miss Gwilt had waited long enough in the park, on the previous Saturday, to hear the lovers' parting words on that occasion, she would have been at no loss to explain the mystery of the volume under Allan's arm, and she would have understood the apology

which he now offered for being late, as readily as Neelie herself.

There is a certain exceptional occasion in life — the occasion of marriage — on which even girls in their teens sometimes become capable (more or less hysterically) of looking at consequences. At the farewell moment of the interview on Saturday, Neelie's mind had suddenly precipitated itself into the future; and she had utterly confounded Allan by inquiring whether the contemplated elopement was an offence punishable by the Law? Her memory satisfied her that she had certainly read somewhere, at some former period, in some book or other (possibly a novel), of an elopement with a dreadful end — of a bride dragged home in hysterics — and of a bridegroom sentenced to languish in prison, with all his beautiful hair cut off, by Act of Parliament, close to his head. Supposing she could bring herself to consent to the elopement at all — which she positively declined to promise — she must first insist on discovering whether there was any fear of the police being concerned in her marriage as well as the parson and the clerk. Allan being a man, ought to know; and to Allan she looked for information — with this preliminary assurance to assist him in laying down the law, that she would die of a broken heart a thousand times over, rather than be the innocent means of sending him to languish in prison, and of cutting his hair off, by Act of Parliament, close to his head. "It's no laughing matter," said Neelie resolutely, in conclusion; "I decline even to think of our marriage, till my mind is made easy first on the subject of the Law."

"But I don't know anything about the law, not

even as much as you do," said Allan. "Hang the law! I don't mind my head being cropped. Let's risk it."

"Risk it?" repeated Neelie, indignantly. "Have you no consideration for *me?* I won't risk it! Where there's a will, there's a way. We must find out the law for ourselves."

"With all my heart," said Allan. "How?"

"Out of books, to be sure! There must be quantities of information in that enormous library of yours at the great house. If you really love me, you won't mind going over the backs of a few thousand books, for my sake!"

"I'll go over the backs of ten thousand!" cried Allan, warmly. "Would you mind telling me what I'm to look for?"

"For 'Law,' to be sure! When it says 'Law' on the back, open it, and look inside for Marriage — read every word of it — and then come here and explain it to me. What? you don't think your head is to be trusted to do such a simple thing as that?"

"I'm certain it isn't," said Allan. "Can't you help me?"

"Of course I can, if you can't manage without me! Law may be hard, but it can't be harder than music; and I must, and will, satisfy my mind. Bring me all the books you can find, on Monday morning — in a wheelbarrow, if there are a good many of them, and if you can't manage it in any other way."

The result of this conversation was Allan's appearance in the park, with a volume of Blackstone's Commentaries under his arm, on the fatal Monday

morning, when Miss Gwilt's written engagement of marriage was placed in Midwinter's hands. Here again, in this, as in all other human instances, the widely discordant elements of the grotesque and the terrible were forced together by that subtle law of contrast which is one of the laws of mortal life. Amid all the thickening complications now impending over their heads — with the shadow of meditated murder stealing towards one of them already, from the lurking-place that hid Miss Gwilt — the two sat down, unconscious of the future, with the book between them; and applied themselves to the study of the law of marriage, with a grave resolution to understand it, which, in two such students, was nothing less than a burlesque in itself!

"Find the place," said Neelie, as soon as they were comfortably established. "We must manage this, by what they call a division of labour. You shall read — and I'll take notes."

She produced forthwith a smart little pocket-book and pencil, and opened the book in the middle, where there was a blank page on the right hand and the left. At the top of the right-hand page, she wrote the word *Good*. At the top of the left-hand page, she wrote the word *Bad*. "'Good' means where the law is on our side," she explained; "and 'Bad' means where the law is against us. We will have 'Good' and 'Bad' opposite each other, all down the two pages; and when we get to the bottom, we'll add them up, and act accordingly. They say girls have no heads for business. Haven't they! Don't look at me — look at Blackstone, and begin."

"Would you mind giving me a kiss first?" asked Allan.

"I should mind it very much. In our serious situation, when we have both got to exert our intellects, I wonder you can ask for such a thing!"

"That's why I asked for it," said the unblushing Allan. "I feel as if it would clear your head."

"Oh, if it would clear your head, that's quite another thing! I must clear your head of course, at any sacrifice. Only one, mind," she whispered coquettishly; "and pray be careful of Blackstone, or you'll lose the place."

There was a pause in the conversation. Blackstone and the pocket-book both rolled on the ground together.

"If this happens again," said Neelie, picking up the pocket-book, with her eyes and her complexion at their brightest and best, "I shall sit with my back to you for the rest of the morning. *Will* you go on?"

Allan found his place for the second time, and fell headlong into the bottomless abyss of the English Law.

"Page two-hundred-and-eighty," he began. "Law of husband and wife. Here's a bit I don't understand, to begin with: — 'It may be observed generally, that the law considers marriage in the light of a Contract.' What does that mean? I thought a contract was the sort of thing a builder signs, when he promises to have the workmen out of the house in a given time, and when the time comes (as my poor mother used to say) the workmen never go."

"Is there nothing about Love?" asked Neelie. "Look a little lower down."

"Not a word. He sticks to his confounded 'Contract,' all the way through."

"Then he's a brute! Go on to something else that's more in our way."

"Here's a bit that's more in our way: — "Incapacities. If any persons under legal incapacities come together, it is a meretricious, and not a matrimonial union.' (Blackstone's a good one at long words, isn't he? I wonder what he means by meretricious?) 'The first of these legal disabilities is a prior marriage, and having another husband or wife living —,"

"Stop!" said Neelie. "I must make a note of that." She gravely made her first entry on the page headed "Good," as follows: — "I have no husband, and Allan has no wife. We are both entirely unmarried at the present time."

"All right, so far," remarked Allan, looking over her shoulder.

"Go on," said Neelie. "What next?"

"'The next disability,'" proceeded Allan, "'is want of age. The age for consent to matrimony is, fourteen in males, and twelve in females.' Come!" cried Allan cheerfully, "Blackstone begins early enough at any rate!"

Neelie was too business-like to make any other remark, on her side, than the necessary remark in the pocket-book. She made another entry under the head of "Good:" — "I am old enough to consent, and so is Allan too. Go on," resumed Neelie, looking over the reader's shoulder. "Never mind all that prosing of Blackstone's, about the husband being of years of discretion, and the wife under twelve. Abominable wretch! the wife under twelve! Skip to the third incapacity, if there is one."

"The third incapacity," Allan went on, "is want of reason."

Neelie immediately made a third entry on the side of "Good:" "Allan and I are both perfectly reasonable — skip to the next page."

Allan skipped. "A fourth incapacity is in respect of proximity of relationship."

A fourth entry followed instantly on the cheering side of the pocket-book: — "He loves me and I love him — without our being in the slightest degree related to each other. Any more?" asked Neelie, tapping her chin impatiently with the end of the pencil.

"Plenty more," rejoined Allan; "all in hieroglyphics. Look here: 'Marriage Acts, 4 Geo. iv. c. 76, and 6 and 7 Will. iv. c. 85 (*q*).' Blackstone's intellect seems to be wandering here. Shall we take another skip, and see if he picks himself up again on the next page."

"Wait a little," said Neelie; "what's that I see in the middle?" She read for a minute in silence, over Allan's shoulder, and suddenly clasped her hands in despair. "I knew I was right!" she exclaimed. "Oh, heavens, here it is!"

"Where?" asked Allan. "I see nothing about languishing in prison, and cropping a fellow's hair close to his head, unless it's in the hieroglyphics. 'Is '4 Geo. iv.' short for 'Lock him up?' and does 'c. 85 (*q*)' mean, 'Send for the hair-cutter?'"

"Pray be serious," remonstrated Neelie. "We are both sitting on a volcano. There!" she said, pointing to the place. "Read it! If anything can bring you to a proper sense of our situation, *that* will."

Allan cleared his throat, and Neelie held the point

of her pencil ready on the depressing side of the account — otherwise the "Bad" page of the pocket-book.

"'And as it is the policy of our law,' Allan began, 'to prevent the marriage of persons under the age of twenty-one, without the consent of parents and guardians'" — (Neelie made her first entry on the side of "Bad." "I am only seventeen next birthday, and circumstances forbid me to confide my attachment to papa") — "'it is provided that in the case of the publication of banns of a person under twenty-one, not being a widower or widow, who are deemed emancipated'" — (Neelie made another entry on the depressing side. "Allan is not a widower, and I am not a widow; consequently, we are neither of us emancipated,") — "'if the parent or guardian openly signifies his dissent at the time the banns are published'" — ("which papa would be certain to do") — "'such publication would be void.' I'll take breath here, if you'll allow me," said Allan. "Blackstone might put it in shorter sentences, I think, if he can't put it in fewer words. Cheer up, Neelie! there must be other ways of marrying, besides this roundabout way, that ends in a Publication and a Void. Infernal gibberish! I could write better English myself."

"We are not at the end of it yet," said Neelie. "The Void is nothing to what is to come."

"Whatever it is," rejoined Allan, "we'll treat it like a dose of physic — we'll take it at once, and be done with it." He went on reading: — "'And no licence to marry without banns shall be granted, unless oath shall be first made by one of the parties that he or she believes that there is no impediment of kindred

or alliance' — well, I can take my oath of that with a safe conscience! What next? 'And one of the said parties must, for the space of fifteen days immediately preceding such licence, have had his or her usual place of abode within the parish or chapelry within which such marriage is to be solemnized!' Chapelry! I'd live fifteen days in a dog-kennel with the greatest pleasure. I say, Neelie, all this seems like plain sailing enough. What are you shaking your head about? Go on, and I shall see? Oh, all right; I'll go on. Here we are — 'And where one of the said parties, not being a widower or widow, shall be under the age of twenty-one years, oath must first be made that the consent of the person or persons whose consent is required, has been obtained, or that there is no person having authority to give such cousent. The consent required by this Act is that of the father —'" At those last formidable words Allan came to a full stop. "The consent of the father," he repeated, with all needful seriousness of look and manner. "I couldn't exactly swear to that, could I?"

Neelie answered in expressive silence. She handed him the pocket-book, with the final entry completed, on the side of "Bad," in these terms — "Our marriage is impossible, unless Allan commits perjury."

The lovers looked at each other across the insuperable obstacle of Blackstone, in speechless dismay.

"Shut up the book," said Neelie, resignedly. "I have no doubt we should find the police, and the prison, and the hair-cutting — all punishments for perjury, exactly as I told you! — if we looked at the next page. But we needn't trouble ourselves to look; we have found out quite enough already. It's all over

with us. I must go to school on Saturday, and you must manage to forget me as soon as you can. Perhaps we may meet in after-life, and you may be a widower and I may be a widow, and the cruel law may consider us emancipated, when it's too late to be of the slightest use. By that time no doubt I shall be old and ugly, and you will naturally have ceased to care about me, and it will all end in the grave, and the sooner the better. Good-by," concluded Neelie, rising mournfully, with the tears in her eyes. "It's only prolonging our misery to stop here, unless — unless you have anything to propose?"

"I've got something to propose," cried the headlong Allan. "It's an entirely new idea. Would you mind trying the blacksmith at Gretna Green?"

"No earthly consideration," answered Neelie indignantly, "would induce me to be married by a blacksmith!"

"Don't be offended," pleaded Allan; "I meant it for the best. Lots of people in our situation have tried the blacksmith, and found him quite as good as a clergyman, and a most amiable man, I believe, into the bargain. Never mind! We must try another string to our bow."

"We haven't got another to try," said Neelie.

"Take my word for it," persisted Allan stoutly, "there must be ways and means of circumventing Blackstone (without perjury), if we only knew of them. It's a matter of law, and we must consult somebody in the profession. I daresay it's a risk. But nothing venture, nothing have. What do you say to young Pedgift? He's a thorough good fellow. I'm sure we could trust young Pedgift to keep our secret."

"Not for worlds!" exclaimed Neelie. "You may be willing to trust your secrets to the vulgar little wretch, I won't have him trusted with mine. I hate him. No!" she concluded, with a mounting colour and a peremptory stamp of her foot on the grass. "I positively forbid you to take any of the Thorpe-Ambrose people into your confidence. They would instantly suspect *me*, and it would be all over the place in a moment. My attachment may be an unhappy one," remarked Neelie, with her handkerchief to her eyes, "and papa may nip it in the bud, but I won't have it profaned by the town-gossip!"

"Hush! hush!" said Allan. "I won't say a word at Thorpe-Ambrose, I won't indeed!" He paused, and considered for a moment. "There's another way!" he burst out, brightening up on the instant. "We've got the whole week before us. I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll go to London!"

There was a sudden rustling — heard neither by one nor the other — among the trees behind them that screened Miss Gwilt. One more of the difficulties in her way (the difficulty of getting Allan to London) now promised to be removed by an act of Allan's own will.

"To London?" repeated Neelie, looking up in astonishment.

"To London!" reiterated Allan. "That's far enough away from Thorpe-Ambrose, surely? Wait a minute, and don't forget that this is a question of law. Very well, I know some lawyers in London who managed all my business for me when I first came in for this property; they are just the men to consult. And if they decline to be mixed up in it, there's their head

clerk, who is one of the best fellows I ever met with in my life. I asked him to go yachting with me, I remember; and though he couldn't go, he said he felt the obligation all the same. That's the man to help us. Blackstone's a mere infant to him. Don't say it's absurd; don't say it's exactly like *me*. Do pray hear me out. I won't breathe your name or your father's. I'll describe you as 'a young lady to whom I am devotedly attached.' And if my friend the clerk asks where you live, I'll say the north of Scotland, or the west of Ireland, or the Channel Islands, or anywhere else you like. My friend the clerk is a total stranger to Thorpe-Ambrose and everybody in it (which is one recommendation); and in five minutes' time, he'd put me up to what to do (which is another). If you only knew him! He's one of those extraordinary men who appear once or twice in a century — the sort of man who won't allow you to make a mistake if you try. All I have got to say to him (putting it short) is, 'My dear fellow, I want to be privately married, without perjury.' All he has got to say to me (putting it short) is, 'You must do So-and-So, and So-and-So; and you must be careful to avoid This, That, and The other. I have nothing in the world to do but to follow his directions; and you have nothing in the world to do but what the bride always does when the bridegroom is ready and willing!" His arm stole round Neelie's waist, and his lips pointed the moral of the last sentence with that inarticulate eloquence which is so uniformly successful in persuading a woman against her will.

All Neelie's meditated objections dwindled, in spite of her, to one feeble little question. "Suppose I allow you to go, Allan?" she whispered, toying nervously

with the stud in the bosom of his shirt. "Shall you be very long away?"

"I'll be off to-day," said Allan, "by the eleven o'clock train. And I'll be back to-morrow, if I and my friend the clerk can settle it all in time. If not, by Wednesday at latest."

"You'll write to me every day?" pleaded Neelie, clinging a little closer to him. "I shall sink under the suspense, if you don't promise to write to me every day."

Allan promised to write twice a day, if she liked — letter-writing, which was such an effort to other men, was no effort to *him!*

"And mind, whatever those people may say to you in London," proceeded Neelie, "I insist on your coming back for me. I positively decline to run away, unless you promise to fetch me."

Allan promised for the second time, on his sacred word of honour, and at the full compass of his voice. But Neelie was not satisfied even yet. She reverted to first principles, and insisted on knowing whether Allan was quite sure he loved her. Allan called heaven to witness how sure he was, and got another question directly for his pains. Could he solemnly declare that he would never regret taking Neelie away from home? Allan called heaven to witness again, louder than ever. All to no purpose! The ravenous female appetite for tender protestations still hungered for more. "I know what will happen one of these days," persisted Neelie. "You will see some other girl who is prettier than I am; and you will wish you had married her instead of Me!"

As Allan opened his lips for a final outburst of

asseveration, the stable-clock at the great house was faintly audible in the distance, striking the hour. Neelie started guiltily. It was breakfast-time at the cottage — in other words, time to take leave. At the last moment her heart went back to her father; and her head sank on Allan's bosom as she tried to say, Good-by. "Papa has always been so kind to me, Allan," she whispered, holding him back tremulously when he turned to leave her. "It seems so guilty and so heartless to go away from him and be married in secret. Oh, do, do think before you really go to London; is there no way of making him a little kinder and juster to *you?*" The question was useless; the major's resolutely unfavourable reception of Allan's letter rose in Neelie's memory, and answered her as the words passed her lips. With a girl's impulsiveness she pushed Allan away before he could speak, and signed to him impatiently to go. The conflict of contending emotions, which she had mastered thus far, burst its way outward in spite of her after he had waved his hand for the last time, and had disappeared in the depths of the dell. When she turned from the place, on her side, her long-restrained tears fell freely at last, and made the lonely way back to the cottage the dimmest prospect that Neelie had seen for many a long day past.

As she hurried homeward, the leaves parted behind her, and Miss Gwilt stepped softly into the open space. She stood there in triumph, tall, beautiful, and resolute. Her lovely colour brightened while she watched Neelie's retreating figure hastening lightly away from her over the grass.

"Cry, you little fool!" she said, with her quiet clear

tones, and her steady smile of contempt. "Cry as you have never cried yet! You have seen the last of your sweetheart."

CHAPTER XII.

A Scandal at the Station.

AN hour later, the landlady at Miss Gwilt's lodgings was lost in astonishment, and the clamorous tongues of the children were in a state of ungovernable revolt. "Unforeseen circumstances" had suddenly obliged the tenant of the first floor to terminate the occupation of her apartments, and to go to London that day by the eleven o'clock train.

"Please to have a fly at the door at half-past ten," said Miss Gwilt, as the amazed landlady followed her upstairs. "And excuse me, you good creature, if I beg and pray not to be disturbed till the fly comes."

Once inside the room, she locked the door, and then opened her writing-desk. "Now for my letter to the major!" she said. "How shall I word it?"

A moment's consideration apparently decided her. Searching through her collection of pens, she carefully selected the worst that could be found, and began the letter by writing the date of the day on a soiled sheet of note-paper, in crooked, clumsy characters, which ended in a blot made purposely with the feather of the pen. Pausing, sometimes to think a little, sometimes to make another blot, she completed the letter in these words: —

"HONᴰ SIR, — It is on my conscience to tell you something, which I think you ought to know. You

ought to know of the goings-on of Miss, your daughter, with young Mister Armadale. I wish you to make sure, and what is more, I advise you to be quick about it, if she is going the way you want her to go, when she takes her morning walk before breakfast. I scorn to make mischief, where there is true love on both sides. But I don't think the young man means truly by Miss. What I mean is, I think Miss only has his fancy. Another person, who shall be nameless betwixt us, has his true heart. Please to pardon my not putting my name; I am only an humble person, and it might get me into trouble. This is all at present, dear sir, from yours,

"A Well-Wisher."

"There!" said Miss Gwilt, as she folded the letter up. "If I had been a professed novelist, I could hardly have written more naturally in the character of a servant than that!" She wrote the necessary address to Major Milroy; looked admiringly for the last time at the coarse and clumsy writing which her own delicate hand had produced; and rose to post the letter herself, before she entered next on the serious business of packing up. "Curious!" she thought, when the letter had been posted, and she was back again making her travelling preparations in her own room; "here I am, running headlong into a frightful risk — and I never was in better spirits in my life!"

The boxes were ready when the fly was at the door, and Miss Gwilt was equipped (as becomingly as usual) in her neat travelling costume. The thick veil, which she was accustomed to wear in London, appeared on her country straw-bonnet for the first time. "One meets

such rude men occasionally in the railway," she said to the landlady. "And though I dress quietly, my hair is so very remarkable." She was a little paler than usual; but she had never been so sweet-tempered and engaging, so gracefully cordial and friendly, as now, when the moment of departure had come. The simple people of the house were quite moved at taking leave of her. She insisted on shaking hands with the landlord — on speaking to him in her prettiest way, and sunning him in her brightest smiles. "Come!" she said to the landlady, "you have been so kind, you have been so like a mother to me, you must give me a kiss at parting." She embraced the children all together in a lump, with a mixture of humour and tenderness delightful to see, and left a shilling among them to buy a cake. "If I was only rich enough to make it a sovereign," she whispered to the mother, "how glad I should be!" The awkward lad who ran on errands stood waiting at the fly-door. He was clumsy, he was frowsy, he had a gaping mouth and a turn-up nose — but the ineradicable female delight in being charming, accepted him, for all that, in the character of a last chance. "You dear dingy John!" she said kindly at the carriage door; "I am so poor I have only sixpence to give you — with my very best wishes. Take my advice, John — grow to be a fine man, and find yourself a nice sweetheart! Thank you a thousand times!" She gave him a friendly little pat on the cheek with two of her gloved fingers, and smiled, and nodded, and got into the fly.

"Armadale next!" she said to herself as the carriage drove off.

Allan's anxiety not to miss the train had brought him to the station in better time than usual. After taking his ticket and putting his portmanteau under the porter's charge, he was pacing the platform and thinking of Neelie — when he heard the rustling of a lady's dress behind him, and turning round to look, found himself face to face with Miss Gwilt.

There was no escaping her this time. The station wall was on his right hand, and the line was on his left; a tunnel was behind him, and Miss Gwilt was in front, inquiring in her sweetest tones whether Mr. Armadale was going to London.

Allan coloured scarlet with vexation and surprise. There he was, obviously waiting for the train; and there was his portmanteau close by, with his name on it, already labelled for London! What answer but the true one could he make after that? Could he let the train go without him, and lose the precious hours so vitally important to Neelie and himself? Impossible! Allan helplessly confirmed the printed statement on his portmanteau, and heartily wished himself at the other end of the world as he said the words.

"How very fortunate!" rejoined Miss Gwilt. "I am going to London too. Might I ask you, Mr. Armadale (as you seem to be quite alone), to be my escort on the journey?"

Allan looked at the little assembly of travellers, and travellers' friends, collected on the platform, near the booking-office door. They were all Thorpe-Ambrose people. He was probably known by sight, and Miss Gwilt was probably known by sight, to every one of them. In sheer desperation, hesitating more awkwardly than ever, he produced his cigar-case. "I

should be delighted," he said, with an embarrassment which was almost an insult under the circumstances. "But I — I'm what the people who get sick over a cigar, call a slave to smoking."

"I delight in smoking!" said Miss Gwilt, with undiminished vivacity and good humour. "It's one of the privileges of the men which I have always envied. I'm afraid, Mr. Armadale, you must think I am forcing myself on you. It certainly looks like it. The real truth is, I want particularly to say a word to you in private about Mr. Midwinter."

The train came up at the same moment. Setting Midwinter out of the question, the common decencies of politeness left Allan no alternative but to submit. After having been the cause of her leaving her situation at Major Milroy's, after having pointedly avoided her only a few days since on the high road, to have declined going to London in the same carriage with Miss Gwilt would have been an act of downright brutality which it was simply impossible to commit. "Damn her!" said Allan, internally, as he handed his travelling companion into an empty carriage, officiously placed at his disposal, before all the people at the station, by the guard. "You shan't be disturbed, sir," the man whispered confidentially, with a smile, and a touch of his hat. Allan could have knocked him down with the utmost pleasure. "Stop!" he said, from the window. "I don't want the carriage —" It was useless; the guard was out of hearing; the whistle blew, and the train started for London.

The select assembly of travellers' friends, left behind on the platform, congregated in a circle on the spot, with the station-master in the centre.

The station-master — otherwise Mr. Mack — was a popular character in the neighbourhood. He possessed two social qualifications which invariably impress the average English mind — he was an old soldier, and he was a man of few words. The conclave on the platform insisted on taking his opinion, before it committed itself positively to an opinion of its own. A brisk fire of remarks exploded, as a matter of course, on all sides; but everybody's view of the subject ended interrogatively, in a question aimed point-blank at the station-master's ears.

"She's got him, hasn't she?" "She'll come back 'Mrs. Armadale,' won't she?" "He'd better have stuck to Miss Milroy, hadn't he?" "Miss Milroy stuck to *him*. She paid him a visit at the great house, didn't she?" "Nothing of the sort; it's a shame to take the girl's character away. She was caught in a thunderstorm close by; he was obliged to give her shelter; and she's never been near the place since. Miss Gwilt's been there, if you like, with no thunderstorm to force *her* in; and Miss Gwilt's off with him to London in a carriage all to themselves, eh, Mr. Mack?" "Ah, he's a soft one, that Armadale! with all his money, to take up with a red-haired woman, a good eight or nine years older than he is! She's thirty if she's a day. That's what I say, Mr. Mack. What do you say?" "Older or younger, she'll rule the roast at Thorpe-Ambrose; and I say, for the sake of the place, and for the sake of trade, let's make the best of it; and Mr. Mack, as a man of the world, sees it in the same light as I do, don't you, sir?"

"Gentlemen," said the station-master, with his abrupt military accent, and his impenetrable military

manner, "she's a devilish fine woman. And when I was Mr. Armadale's age, it's my opinion, if her fancy had laid that way, she might have married Me."

With that expression of opinion the station-master wheeled to the right, and intrenched himself impregnably in the stronghold of his own office.

The citizens of Thorpe-Ambrose looked at the closed door, and gravely shook their heads. Mr. Mack had disappointed them. No opinion which openly recognizes the frailty of human nature, is ever a popular opinion with mankind. "It's as good as saying that any of *us* might have married her, if *we* had been Mr. Armadale's age!" Such was the general impression on the minds of the conclave, when the meeting had been adjourned, and the members were leaving the station.

The last of the party to go was a slow old gentleman, with a habit of deliberately looking about him. Pausing at the door, this observant person stared up the platform, and down the platform, and discovered in the latter direction, standing behind an angle of the wall, an elderly man in black, who had escaped the notice of everybody up to that time. "Why, bless my soul!" said the old gentleman, advancing inquisitively by a step at a time, "it can't be Mr. Bashwood!"

It *was* Mr. Bashwood — Mr. Bashwood, whose constitutional curiosity had taken him privately to the station, bent on solving the mystery of Allan's sudden journey to London — Mr. Bashwood who had seen and heard, behind his angle in the wall, what everybody else had seen and heard, and who appeared to have been impressed by it in no ordinary way. He stood stiffly against the wall, like a man petrified, with

one hand pressed on his bare head, and the other holding his hat — he stood, with a dull flush on his face, and a dull stare in his eyes, looking straight into the black depths of the tunnel outside the station, as if the train to London had disappeared in it but the moment before.

"Is your head bad?" asked the old gentleman. "Take my advice. Go home and lie down."

Mr. Bashwood listened mechanically, with his usual attention, and answered mechanically, with his usual politeness.

"Yes, sir," he said, in a low lost tone, like a man between dreaming and waking; "I'll go home and lie down."

"That's right," rejoined the old gentleman, making for the door. "And take a pill, Mr. Bashwood — take a pill."

Five minutes later, the porter charged with the business of locking up the station, found Mr. Bashwood still standing bareheaded against the wall, and still looking straight into the black depths of the tunnel, as if the train to London had disappeared in it but a moment since.

"Come, sir!" said the porter. "I must lock up. Are you out of sorts? Anything wrong with your inside? Try a drop of gin-and-bitters."

"Yes," said Mr. Bashwood, answering the porter exactly as he had answered the old gentleman; "I'll try a drop of gin-and-bitters."

The porter took him by the arm, and led him out. "You'll get it there," said the man, pointing confidentially to a public-house; "and you'll get it good."

"I shall get it there," echoed Mr. Bashwood, still mechanically repeating what was said to him; "and I shall get it good."

His will seemed to be paralysed; his actions depended absolutely on what other people told him to do. He took a few steps in the direction of the public-house — hesitated; staggered — and caught at the pillar of one of the station lamps near him.

The porter followed, and took him by the arm once more.

"Why, you've been drinking already!" exclaimed the man, with a suddenly-quickened interest in Mr. Bashwood's case. "What was it? Beer?"

Mr. Bashwood, in his low lost tones, echoed the last word.

It was close on the porter's dinner-time. But when the lower orders of the English people believe they have discovered an intoxicated man, their sympathy with him is boundless. The porter let his dinner take its chance, and carefully assisted Mr. Bashwood to reach the public-house. "Gin-and-bitters will put you on your legs again," whispered this Samaritan setter-right of the alcoholic disasters of mankind.

If Mr. Bashwood had really been intoxicated, the effect of the porter's remedy would have been marvellous indeed. Almost as soon as the glass was emptied, the stimulant did its work. The long-weakened nervous system of the deputy-steward, prostrated for the moment by the shock that had fallen on it, rallied again like a weary horse under the spur. The dull flush on his cheeks, the dull stare in his eyes, disappeared simultaneously. After a momentary effort, he recovered memory enough of what had passed to thank the porter, and to ask whether he would take something himself. The worthy creature instantly accepted a dose of his own remedy — in the capacity of

a preventive — and went home to dinner as only those men can go home who are physically warmed by gin-and-bitters, and morally elevated by the performance of a good action.

Still strangely abstracted (but conscious now of the way by which he went), Mr. Bashwood left the public-house a few minutes later, in his turn. He walked on mechanically, in his dreary black garments, moving like a blot on the white surface of the sun-brightened road, as Midwinter had seen him move in the early days at Thorpe-Ambrose when they had first met. Arrived at the point where he had to choose between the way that led into the town, and the way that led to the great house, he stopped, incapable of deciding, and careless, apparently, even of making the attempt. "I'll be revenged on her!" he whispered to himself, still absorbed in his jealous frenzy of rage against the woman who had deceived him. "I'll be revenged on her," he repeated, in louder tones, "if I spend every halfpenny I've got!"

Some women of the disorderly sort, passing on their way to the town, heard him. "Ah, you old brute," they called out, with the measureless licence of their class; "whatever she did, she served you right!"

The coarseness of the voices startled him, whether he comprehended the words or not. He shrank away from more interruption and more insult, into the quieter road that led to the great house.

At a solitary place by the wayside, he stopped and sat down. He took off his hat, and lifted his youthful wig a little from his bald old head, and tried desperately to get beyond the one immovable conviction which lay on his mind like lead — the conviction that

Miss Gwilt had been purposely deceiving him from the first. It was useless. No effort would free him from that one dominant impression, and from the one answering idea that it had evoked — the idea of revenge. He got up again, and put on his hat, and walked rapidly forward a little way — then turned without knowing why, and slowly walked back again. "If I had only dressed a little smarter!" said the poor wretch, helplessly. "If I had only been a little bolder with her, she might have overlooked my being an old man!" The angry fit returned on him. He clenched his clammy trembling hands, and shook them fiercely in the empty air "I'll be revenged on her," he reiterated. "I'll be revenged on her, if I spend every halfpenny I've got!" It was terribly suggestive of the hold she had taken on him, that his vindictive sense of injury could not get far enough away from her to reach the man whom he believed to be his rival, even yet. In his rage, as in his love, he was absorbed, body and soul, by Miss Gwilt.

In a moment more, the noise of running wheels approaching from behind startled him. He turned, and looked round. There was Mr. Pedgift the elder rapidly overtaking him in the gig, just as Mr. Pedgift had overtaken him once already, on that former occasion when he had listened under the window at the great house, and when the lawyer had bluntly charged him with feeling a curiosity about Miss Gwilt!

In an instant, the inevitable association of ideas burst on his mind. The opinion of Miss Gwilt, which he had heard the lawyer express to Allan, at parting, flashed back into his memory, side by side with Mr. Pedgift's sarcastic approval of anything in the way of

inquiry which his own curiosity might attempt. "I may be even with her yet," he thought, "if Mr. Pedgift will help me! — Stop, sir!" he called out desperately as the gig came up with him. "If you please, sir, I want to speak to you."

Pedgift Senior slackened the pace of his fast-trotting mare, without pulling up. "Come to the office in half-an-hour," he said. "I'm busy now." Without waiting for an answer, without noticing Mr. Bashwood's bow, he gave the mare the rein again, and was out of sight in another minute.

Mr. Bashwood sat down once more in a shady place by the roadside. He appeared to be incapable of feeling any slight but the one unpardonable slight put upon him by Miss Gwilt. He not only declined to resent, he even made the best of Mr. Pedgift's unceremonious treatment of him. "Half-an-hour," he said resignedly. "Time enough to compose myself; and I want time. Very kind of Mr. Pedgift, though he mightn't have meant it."

The sense of oppression on his head forced him once again to remove his hat. He sat with it on his lap, deep in thought; his face bent low, and the wavering fingers of one hand drumming absently on the crown of the hat. If Mr. Pedgift the elder, seeing him as he sat now, could only have looked a little way into the future, the monotonously-drumming hand of the deputy-steward might have been strong enough, feeble as it was, to stop the lawyer by the roadside. It was the worn, weary, miserable old hand of a worn, weary, miserable old man — but it was, for all that (to use the language of Mr. Pedgift's own parting prediction to Allan), the hand that was now destined to "let the light in on Miss Gwilt."

CHAPTER XIII.

An Old Man's Heart.

PUNCTUAL to the moment, when the half hour's interval had expired, Mr. Bashwood was announced at the office, as waiting to see Mr. Pedgift by special appointment.

The lawyer looked up from his papers with an air of annoyance: he had totally forgotten the meeting by the roadside. "See what he wants," said Pedgift Senior to Pedgift Junior, working in the same room with him. "And if it's nothing of importance, put it off to some other time."

Pedgift Junior swiftly disappeared, and swiftly returned.

"Well?" asked the father.

"Well," answered the son, "he is rather more shaky and unintelligible than usual. I can make nothing out of him, except that he persists in wanting to see you. My own idea," pursued Pedgift Junior, with his usual sardonic gravity, "is, that he is going to have a fit, and that he wishes to acknowledge your uniform kindness to him, by obliging you with a private view of the whole proceeeding."

Pedgift Senior habitually matched everybody — his son included — with their own weapons. "Be good enough to remember, Augustus," he rejoined, "that My Room is not a Court of Law. A bad joke is not invariably followed by 'roars of laughter' *here*. Let Mr. Bashwood come in."

Mr. Bashwood was introduced, and Pedgift Junior withdrew. "You mustn't bleed him, sir," whispered the incorrigible joker, as he passed the back of his

father's chair. "Hot-water bottles to the soles of his feet, and a mustard plaster on the pit of his stomach — that's the modern treatment."

"Sit down, Bashwood," said Pedgift Senior, when they were alone. "And don't forget that time's money. Out with it, whatever it is, at the quickest possible rate, and in the fewest possible words."

These preliminary directions, bluntly but not at all unkindly spoken, rather increased than diminished the painful agitation under which Mr. Bashwood was suffering. He stammered more helplessly, he trembled more continuously than usual, as he made his little speech of thanks, and added his apologies at the end for intruding on his patron in business hours.

"Everybody in the place, Mr. Pedgift, sir, knows your time is valuable. Oh, dear, yes! oh, dear, yes! most valuable, most valuable! Excuse me, sir, I'm coming out with it. Your goodness — or rather your business — no, your goodness gave me half-an-hour to wait — and I have thought of what I had to say, and prepared it, and put it short." Having got as far as that, he stopped with a pained, bewildered look. He had put it away in his memory, and now, when the time came, he was too confused to find it. And there was Mr. Pedgift mutely waiting; his face and manner expressive alike of that silent sense of the value of his own time, which every patient who has visited a great doctor, every client who has consulted a lawyer in large practice, knows so well. "Have you heard the news, sir?" stammered Mr. Bashwood, shifting his ground in despair, and letting the uppermost idea in his mind escape him, simply because it was the one idea in him that was ready to come out.

"Does it concern *me?*" asked Pedgift Senior, mercilessly brief, and mercilessly straight in coming to the point.

"It concerns a lady, sir, — no, not a lady — a young man I ought to say, in whom you used to feel some interest. Oh, Mr. Pedgift, sir, what do you think! Mr. Armadale and Miss Gwilt have gone up to London together to-day — alone, sir — alone in a carriage reserved for their two selves. Do you think he's going to marry her? Do you really think, like the rest of them, he's going to marry her?"

He put the question with a sudden flush in his face, and a sudden energy in his manner. His sense of the value of the lawyer's time, his conviction of the greatness of the lawyer's condescension, his constitutional shyness and timidity — all yielded together to his one overwhelming interest in hearing Mr. Pedgift's answer. He was loud for the first time in his life, in putting the question.

"After my experience of Mr. Armadale," said the lawyer, instantly hardening in look and manner, "I believe him to be infatuated enough to marry Miss Gwilt a dozen times over, if Miss Gwilt chose to ask him. Your news doesn't surprise me in the least, Bashwood. I'm sorry for him. I can honestly say that, though he *has* set my advice at defiance. And I'm more sorry still," he continued, softening again as his mind reverted to his interview with Neelie under the trees of the park; "I'm more sorry still for another person who shall be nameless. But what have I to do with all this? and what on earth is the matter with you?" he resumed, noticing for the first time the abject misery in Mr. Bashwood's manner, the blank despair

in Mr. Bashwood's face, which his answer had produced. "Are you ill? Is there something behind the curtain that you're afraid to bring out? I don't understand it. Have you come here — here in my private room, in business hours — with nothing to tell me but that young Armadale has been fool enough to ruin his prospects for life? Why, I foresaw it all weeks since, and what is more, I as good as told him so at the last conversation I had with him in the great house."

At those last words, Mr. Bashwood suddenly rallied. The lawyer's passing reference to the great house had led him back in a moment to the purpose that he had in view.

"That's it, sir!" he said eagerly; "that's what I wanted to speak to you about; that's what I've been preparing in my mind. Mr. Pedgift, sir, the last time you were at the great house, when you came away in your gig, you — you overtook me on the drive."

"I daresay I did," remarked Pedgift, resignedly. "My mare happens to be a trifle quicker on her legs than you are on yours, Bashwood. Go on, go on. We shall come in time, I suppose, to what you are driving at."

"You stopped, and spoke to me, sir," proceeded Mr. Bashwood, advancing more and more eagerly to his end. "You said you suspected me of feeling some curiosity about Miss Gwilt, and you told me (I remember the exact words, sir) — you told me to gratify my curiosity by all means, for you didn't object to it."

Pedgift Senior began for the first time to look interested in hearing more.

"I remember something of the sort," he replied; "and I also remember thinking it rather remarkable

that you should *happen* — we won't put it in any more offensive way — to be exactly under Mr. Armsdale's open window while I was talking to him. It might have been accident of course; but it looked rather more like curiosity. I could only judge by appearances," concluded Pedgift, pointing his sarcasm with a pinch of snuff; "and appearances, Bashwood, were decidedly against you."

"I don't deny it, sir. I only mentioned the circumstance because I wished to acknowledge that I *was* curious, and *am* curious about Miss Gwilt."

"Why?" asked Pedgift Senior, seeing something under the surface in Mr. Bashwood's face and manner, but utterly in the dark thus far as to what that something might be.

There was silence for a moment. The moment passed, Mr. Bashwood took the refuge usually taken by nervous unready men, placed in his circumstances, when they are at a loss for an answer. He simply reiterated the assertion that he had just made. "I feel some curiosity, sir," he said, with a strange mixture of doggedness and timidity, "about Miss Gwilt."

There was another moment of silence. In spite of his practised acuteness and knowledge of the world, the lawyer was more puzzled than ever. The case of Mr. Bashwood presented the one human riddle of all others, which he was least qualified to solve. Though year after year witnesses, in thousands and thousands of cases, the remorseless disinheriting of nearest and dearest relations, the unnatural breaking-up of sacred family ties, the deplorable severance of old and firm friendships, due entirely to the intense self-absorption which the sexual passion can produce when it enters

the heart of an old man, the association of love with infirmity and grey hairs arouses, nevertheless, all the world over, no other idea than the idea of extravagant improbability or extravagant absurdity in the general mind. If the interview now taking place in Mr. Pedgift's consulting-room had taken place at his dinner-table instead, when wine had opened his mind to humorous influences, it is possible that he might, by this time, have suspected the truth. But, in his business hours, Pedgift Senior was in the habit of investigating men's motives seriously from the business point of view; and he was on that very account simply incapable of conceiving any improbability so startling, any absurdity so enormous, as the absurdity and improbability of Mr. Bashwood's being in love.

Some men in the lawyer's position would have tried to force their way to enlightenment by obstinately repeating the unanswered question. Pedgift Senior wisely postponed the question until he had moved the conversation on another step. "Well," he resumed, "let us say you feel a curiosity about Miss Gwilt. What next?"

The palms of Mr. Bashwood's hands began to moisten under the influence of his agitation, as they had moistened in the past days when he had told the story of his domestic sorrows to Midwinter at the great house. Once more he rolled his handkerchief into a ball, and dabbed it softly to and fro from one hand to the other.

"May I ask if I am right, sir," he began, "in believing that you have a very unfavourable opinion of Miss Gwilt? You are quite convinced, I think —"

"My good fellow," interrupted Pedgift Senior, "why

need you be in any doubt about it? You were under Mr. Armadale's open window all the while I was talking to him; and your ears, I presume, were not absolutely shut."

Mr. Bashwood showed no sense of the interruption. The little sting of the lawyer's sarcasm was lost in the nobler pain that wrung him from the wound inflicted by Miss Gwilt.

"You are quite convinced, I think, sir," he resumed, "that there are circumstances in this lady's past life, which would be highly discreditable to her if they were discovered at the present time?"

"The window was open at the great house, Bashwood; and your ears, I presume, were not absolutely shut."

Still impenetrable to the sting, Mr. Bashwood persisted more obstinately than ever.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken," he said, "your long experience in such things has even suggested to you, sir, that Miss Gwilt might turn out to be known to the police?"

Pedgift Senior's patience gave way. "You have been over ten minutes in this room," he broke out; "can you, or can you not, tell me in plain English what you want?"

In plain English — with the passion that had transformed him, the passion which (in Miss Gwilt's own words) had made a man of him, burning in his haggard cheeks — Mr. Bashwood met the challenge, and faced the lawyer (as the worried sheep faces the dog) on his own ground.

"I wish to say, sir," he answered, "that your opinion in this matter is my opinion too. I believe

there is something wrong in Miss Gwilt's past life, which she keeps concealed from everybody — and I want to be the man who knows it."

Pedgift Senior saw his chance, and instantly reverted to the question that he had postponed. "Why?" he asked for the second time.

For the second time, Mr. Bashwood hesitated. Could he acknowledge that he had been mad enough to love her, and mean enough to be a spy for her? Could he say, She has deceived me from the first, and she has deserted me now her object is served. After robbing me of my happiness, robbing me of my honour, robbing me of my last hope left in life, she has gone from me for ever, and left me nothing but my old man's longing, slow and sly, and strong and changeless, for revenge. Revenge that I may have, if I can poison her success by dragging her frailties into the public view. Revenge that I will buy (for what is gold or what is life to me?) with the last farthing of my hoarded money and the last drop of my stagnant blood. Could he say that to the man who sat waiting for his answer? No: he could only crush it down and be silent.

The lawyer's expression began to harden once more.

"One of us must speak out," he said; "and, as you evidently won't, I will. I can only account for this extraordinary anxiety of yours to make yourself acquainted with Miss Gwilt's secrets, in one of two ways. Your motive is either an excessively mean one (no offence, Bashwood, I am only putting the case), or an excessively generous one. After my experience of your honest character and your creditable conduct, it is only your due that I should absolve you at once

of the mean motive. I believe you are as incapable as I am — I can say no more — of turning to mercenary account any discoveries you might make to Miss Gwilt's prejudice in Miss Gwilt's past life. Shall I go on any further? or would you prefer, on second thoughts, opening your mind frankly to me of your own accord?"

"I should prefer not interrupting you, sir," said Mr. Bashwood.

"As you please," pursued Pedgift Senior. "Having absolved you of the mean motive, I come to the generous motive next. It is possible that you are an unusually grateful man; and it is certain that Mr. Armadale has been remarkably kind to you. After employing you under Mr. Midwinter, in the steward's office, he has had confidence enough in your honesty and your capacity, now his friend has left him, to put his business entirely and unreservedly in your hands. It's not in my experience of human nature — but it may be possible nevertheless — that you are so gratefully sensible of that confidence, and so gratefully interested in your employer's welfare, that you can't see him, in his friendless position, going straight to his own disgrace and ruin, without making an effort to save him. To put it in two words. Is it your idea that Mr. Armadale might be prevented from marrying Miss Gwilt, if he could be informed in time of her real character? And do you wish to be the man who opens his eyes to the truth? If that is the case ——"

He stopped in astonishment. Acting under some uncontrollable impulse, Mr. Bashwood had started to his feet. He stood, with his withered face lit up by a sudden irradiation from within, which made him look

younger than his age by a good twenty years — he stood, gasping for breath enough to speak, and gesticulated entreatingly at the lawyer with both hands.

"Say it again, sir!" he burst out eagerly; recovering his breath before Pedgift Senior had recovered his surprise. "The question about Mr. Armadale, sir! — only once more! — only once more, Mr. Pedgift, please!"

With his practised observation closely and distrustfully at work on Mr. Bashwood's face, Pedgift Senior motioned to him to sit down again, and put the question for the second time.

"Do I think," said Mr. Bashwood, repeating the sense, but not the words of the question, "that Mr. Armadale might be parted from Miss Gwilt, if she could be shown to him as she really is? Yes, sir! And do I wish to be the man who does it? Yes, sir! yes, sir!! yes, sir!!!"

"It's rather strange," remarked the lawyer, looking at him more and more distrustfully, "that you should be so violently agitated, simply because my question happens to have hit the mark."

The question happened to have hit a mark which Pedgift little dreamed of. It had released Mr. Bashwood's mind in an instant, from the dead pressure of his one dominant idea of revenge, and had shown him a purpose to be achieved by the discovery of Miss Gwilt's secrets, which had never occurred to him till that moment. The marriage which he had blindly regarded as inevitable, was a marriage that might be stopped — not in Allan's interests, but in his own — and the woman whom he believed that he had lost, might yet, in spite of circumstances, be a woman won!

His brain whirled as he thought of it. His own roused resolution almost daunted him, by its terrible incongruity with all the familiar habits of his mind, and all the customary proceedings of his life.

Finding his last remark unanswered, Pedgift Senior considered a little, before he said anything more.

"One thing is clear," reasoned the lawyer with himself. "His true motive in this matter, is a motive which he is afraid to avow. My question evidently offered him a chance of misleading me, and he has accepted it on the spot. That's enough for *me*. If I was Mr. Armadale's lawyer, the mystery might be worth investigating. As things are, it's no interest of mine to hunt Mr. Bashwood from one lie to another, till I run him to earth at last. I have nothing whatever to do with it; and I shall leave him free to follow his own roundabout courses, in his own roundabout way." Having arrived at that conclusion, Pedgift Senior pushed back his chair, and rose briskly to terminate the interview.

"Don't be alarmed, Bashwood," he began. "The subject of our conversation is a subject exhausted, so far as I am concerned. I have only a few last words to say, and it's a habit of mine, as you know, to say my last words on my legs. Whatever else I may be in the dark about, I have made one discovery, at any rate. I have found out what you really want with me — at last! You want me to help you."

"If you would be so very, very kind, sir?" stammered Mr. Bashwood. "If you would only give me the great advantage of your opinion and advice ——?"

"Wait a bit, Bashwood. We will separate those two things if you please. A lawyer may offer an

opinion like any other man; but when a lawyer gives his advice — by the Lord Harry, sir, it's Professional! You're welcome to my opinion in this matter; I have disguised it from nobody. I believe there have been events in Miss Gwilt's career, which (if they could be discovered) would even make Mr. Armadale, infatuated as he is, afraid to marry her — supposing, of course, that he really *is* going to marry her; for though the appearances are in favour of it so far, it is only an assumption after all. As to the mode of proceeding by which the blots on this woman's character might or might not be brought to light in time — she may be married by licence in a fortnight if she likes — *that* is a branch of the question on which I positively decline to enter. It implies speaking in my character as a lawyer, and giving you, what I decline positively to give you, my professional advice."

"Oh, sir, don't say that!" pleaded Mr. Bashwood. "Don't deny me the great favour, the inestimable advantage of your advice! I have such a poor head, Mr. Pedgift! I am so old and so slow, sir, and I get so sadly startled and worried when I'm thrown out of my ordinary ways. It's quite natural you should be a little impatient with me for taking up your time — I know that time is money, to a clever man like you. Would you excuse me — would you please excuse me, if I venture to say that I have saved a little something, a few pounds, sir; and being quite lonely, with nobody dependent on me, I'm sure I may spend my savings as I please?" Blind to every consideration but the one consideration of propitiating Mr. Pedgift, he took out a dingy, ragged old pocket-book, and tried, with trembling fingers, to open it on the lawyer's table.

"Put your pocket-book back directly," said Pedgift Senior. "Richer men than you have tried that argument with me, and have found that there is such a thing (off the stage) as a lawyer who is not to be bribed. I will have nothing to do with the case, under existing circumstances. If you want to know why, I beg to inform you that Miss Gwilt ceased to be professionally interesting to me on the day when I ceased to be Mr. Armadale's lawyer. I may have other reasons besides, which I don't think it necessary to mention. The reason already given is explicit enough. Go your own way, and take your responsibility on your own shoulders. You *may* venture within reach of Miss Gwilt's claws, and come out again without being scratched. Time will show. In the meanwhile, I wish you good-morning — and I own, to my shame, that I never knew till to-day what a hero you were."

This time, Mr. Bashwood felt the sting. Without another word of expostulation or entreaty, without even saying "Good-morning" on his side, he walked to the door, opened it softly, and left the room.

The parting look in his face, and the sudden silence that had fallen on him, were not lost on Pedgift Senior. "Bashwood will end badly," said the lawyer, shuffling his papers, and returning impenetrably to his interrupted work.

The change in Mr. Bashwood's face and manner to something dogged and self-contained, was so startlingly uncharacteristic of him, that it even forced itself on the notice of Pedgift Junior and the clerks, as he passed through the outer office. Accustomed to make the old man their butt, they took a boisterously comic view of

the marked alteration in him. Deaf to the merciless raillery with which he was assailed on all sides, he stopped opposite young Pedgift; and looking him attentively in the face, said, in a quiet absent manner, like a man thinking aloud, "I wonder whether *you* would help me?"

"Open an account instantly," said Pedgift Junior to the clerks, "in the name of Mr. Bashwood. Place a chair for Mr. Bashwood, with a footstool close by, in case he wants it. Supply me with a quire of extra double-wove satin paper, and a gross of picked quills to take notes of Mr. Bashwood's case; and inform my father instantly that I am going to leave him and set up in business for myself, on the strength of Mr. Bashwood's patronage. Take a seat, sir, pray take a seat, and express your feelings freely."

Still impenetrably deaf to the raillery of which he was the object, Mr. Bashwood waited until Pedgift Junior had exhausted himself, and then turned quietly away.

"I ought to have known better," he said, in the same absent manner as before. "He is his father's son all over — he would make game of me on my death-bed." He paused a moment at the door, mechanically brushing his hat with his hand, and went out into the street.

The bright sunshine dazzled his eyes, the passing vehicles and foot-passengers startled and bewildered him. He shrank into a by-street, and put his hand over his eyes. "I'd better go home," he thought, "and shut myself up, and think about it in my own room."

His lodging was in a small house, in the poor quarter of the town. He let himself in with his key,

and stole softly upstairs. The one little room he possessed met him cruelly, look round it where he might, with silent memorials of Miss Gwilt. On the chimney-piece were the flowers she had given him at various times, all withered long since, and all preserved on a little china pedestal, protected by a class shade. On the wall hung a wretched coloured print of a woman, which he had caused to be nicely framed and glazed, because there was a look in it that reminded him of her face. In his clumsy old mahogany writing-desk were the few letters, brief and peremptory, which she had written to him at the time when he was watching and listening meanly at Thorpe-Ambrose to please *her*. And when, turning his back on these, he sat down wearily on his sofa-bedstead — there, hanging over one end of it, was the gaudy cravat of blue satin, which he had bought because she had told him she liked bright colours, and which he had never yet had the courage to wear, though he had taken it out morning after morning with the resolution to put it on! Habitually quiet in his actions, habitually restrained in his language, he now seized the cravat as if it was a living thing that could feel, and flung it to the other end of the room with an oath.

The time passed; and still, though his resolution to stand between Miss Gwilt and her marriage remained unbroken, he was as far as ever from discovering the means which might lead him to his end. The more he thought and thought of it, the darker and the darker his course in the future looked to him.

He rose again, as wearily as he had sat down, and went to his cupboard. "I'm feverish and thirsty," he said; "a cup of tea may help me." He opened his

canister, and measured out his small allowance of tea, less carefully than usual. "Even my own hands won't serve me to-day!" he thought, as he scraped together the few grains of tea that he had spilt, and put them carefully back in the canister.

In that fine summer weather, the one fire in the house was the kitchen-fire. He went downstairs for the boiling water, with his teapot in his hand.

Nobody but the landlady was in the kitchen. She was one of the many English matrons whose path through this world is a path of thorns; and who take a dismal pleasure, whenever the opportunity is afforded them, in inspecting the scratched and bleeding feet of other people in a like condition with themselves. Her one vice was of the lighter sort — the vice of curiosity; and among the many counterbalancing virtues she possessed, was the virtue of greatly respecting Mr. Bashwood, as a lodger whose rent was regularly paid, and whose ways were always quiet and civil from one year's end to another.

"What did you please to want, sir?" asked the landlady. "Boiling water, is it? Did you ever know the water boil, Mr. Bashwood, when you wanted it? Did you ever see a sulkier fire than that? I'll put a stick or two in, if you'll wait a little, and give me the chance. Dear, dear me, you'll excuse my mentioning it, sir, but how poorly you do look to-day!"

The strain on Mr. Bashwood's mind was beginning to tell. Something of the helplessness which he had shown at the station, appeared again in his face and manner as he put his teapot on the kitchen-table, and sat down.

"I'm in trouble, ma'am," he said quietly; "and I find trouble gets harder to bear than it used to be."

"Ah, you may well say that!" groaned the landlady. "*I'm* ready for the undertaker, Mr. Bashwood, when *my* time comes, whatever you may be. You're too lonely, sir. When you're in trouble it's some help — though not much — to shift a share of it off on another person's shoulders. If your good lady had only been alive now, sir, what a comfort you would have found her, wouldn't you?"

A momentary spasm of pain passed across Mr. Bashwood's face. The landlady had ignorantly recalled him to the misfortunes of his married life. He had been long since forced to quiet her curiosity about his family affairs, by telling her that he was a widower, and that his domestic circumstances had not been happy ones; but he had taken her no further into his confidence than this. The sad story which he had related to Midwinter, of his drunken wife who had ended her miserable life in a lunatic asylum, was a story which he had shrunk from confiding to the talkative woman, who would have confided it in her turn to every one else in the house.

"What I always say to my husband, when he's low, sir," pursued the landlady, intent on the kettle, "is, 'What would you do *now*, Sam, without Me?' When his temper don't get the better of him (it will boil directly, Mr. Bashwood), he says, 'Elizabeth, I could do nothing.' When his temper does get the better of him, he says, 'I should try the public-house, missus; and I'll try it now.' Ah, I've got *my* troubles! A man with grown-up sons and daughters tippling in a public-house! I don't call to mind, Mr. Bashwood,

whether *you* ever had any sons and daughters? And yet, now I think of it, I seem to fancy you said yes, you had. Daughters, sir, weren't they? — and, ah, dear! dear! to be sure! all dead."

"I had one daughter, ma'am," said Mr. Bashwood, patiently — "Only one, who died before she was a year old."

"Only one!" repeated the sympathising landlady. "It's as near boiling as it ever will be, sir; give me the teapot. Only one! Ah, it comes heavier (don't it?) when it's an only child? You said it was an only child, I think, didn't you, sir?"

For a moment, Mr. Bashwood looked at the woman with vacant eyes, and without attempting to answer her. After ignorantly recalling the memory of the wife who had disgraced him, she was now, as ignorantly, forcing him back on the miserable remembrance of the son who had ruined and deserted him. For the first time, since he had told his story to Midwinter, at their introductory interview in the great house, his mind reverted once more to the bitter disappointment and disaster of the past. Again, he thought of the bygone days, when he had become security for his son, and when that son's dishonesty had forced him to sell everything he possessed, to pay the forfeit that was exacted when the forfeit was due. "I have a son, ma'am," he said, becoming conscious that the landlady was looking at him in mute and melancholy surprise. "I did my best to help him forward in the world, and he has behaved very badly to me."

"Did he now?" rejoined the landlady, with an appearance of the greatest interest. "Behaved badly to you — almost broke your heart, didn't he? Ah, it

will come home to him, sooner or later. Don't you fear! Honour your father and mother, wasn't put on Moses's tables of stone for nothing, Mr. Bashwood. Where may he be, and what is he doing now, sir?"

The question was in effect almost the same as the question which Midwinter had put when the circumstances had been described to him. As Mr. Bashwood had answered it on the former occasion, so (in nearly the same words) he answered it now.

"My son is in London, ma'am, for all I know to the contrary. He was employed, when I last heard of him, in no very creditable way, at the Private Inquiry Office ——"

At those words, he suddenly checked himself. His face flushed, his eyes brightened; he pushed away the cup which had just been filled for him, and rose from his seat. The landlady started back a step. There was something in her lodger's face that she had never seen in it before.

"I hope I've not offended you, sir," said the woman, recovering her self-possession, and looking a little too ready to take offence on her side, at a moment's notice.

"Far from it, ma'am, far from it!" he rejoined in a strangely eager, hurried way. "I have just remembered something — something very important. I must go upstairs — it's a letter, a letter, a letter. I'll come back to my tea, ma'am. I beg your pardon, I'm much obliged to you, you've been very kind — I'll say good-by, if you'll allow me, for the present." To the landlady's amazement, he cordially shook hands with her, and made for the door, leaving tea and teapot to take care of themselves.

The moment he reached his own room, he locked himself in. For a little while he stood holding by the chimney-piece, waiting to recover his breath. The moment he could move again, he opened his writing-desk on the table. "That for you, Mr. Pedgift and Son!" he said, with a snap of his fingers as he sat down. "I've got a son too!"

There was a knock at the door — a knock, soft, considerate, and confidential. The anxious landlady wished to know whether Mr. Bashwood was ill, and begged to intimate for the second time, that she earnestly trusted she had given him no offence.

"No! no!" he called through the door. "I'm quite well — I'm writing, ma'am, I'm writing — please to excuse me. She's a good woman; she's an excellent woman," he thought when the landlady had retired. "I'll make her a little present. My mind's so unsettled, I might never have thought of it but for her. Oh, if my boy is at the office still! Oh, if I can only write a letter that will make him pity me!"

He took up his pen, and sat thinking anxiously, thinking long, before he touched the paper. Slowly, with many patient pauses to think and think again, and with more than ordinary care to make his writing legible, he traced these lines: —

"My dear James, —

"You will be surprised, I am afraid, to see my handwriting. Pray don't suppose I am going to ask you for money, or to reproach you for having sold me out of house and home when you forfeited your security, and I had to pay. I am willing, and anxious, to let bygones be bygones, and to forget the past.

"It is in your power (if you are still at the Private Inquiry Office) to do me a great service. I am in sore anxiety and trouble, on the subject of a person in whom I am interested. The person is a lady. Please don't make game of me for confessing this, if you can help it. If you knew what I am now suffering, I think you would be more inclined to pity than to make game of me.

"I would enter into particulars, only I know your quick temper, and I fear exhausting your patience. Perhaps, it may be enough to say, that I have reason to believe the lady's past life has not been a very creditable one, and that I am interested — more interested than words can tell — in finding out what her life has really been, and in making the discovery within a fortnight from the present time.

"Though I know very little about the ways of business in an office like yours, I can understand that, without first having the lady's present address, nothing can be done to help me. Unfortunately, I am not yet acquainted with her present address. I only know that she went to town to-day, accompanied by a gentleman, in whose employment I now am, and who (as I believe) will be likely to write to me for money before many days more are over his head.

"Is this circumstance of a nature to help us? I venture to say 'us,' because I count already, my dear boy, on your kind assistance and advice. Don't let money stand between us — I have saved a little something, and it is all freely at your disposal. Pray, pray write to me by return of post! If you will only try your best to end the dreadful suspense under which I am now suffering, you will atone for all the grief and

disappointment you caused me in times that are past, and you will confer an obligation that he will never forget, on,

"Your affectionate Father,

"FELIX BASHWOOD."

After waiting a little, to dry his eyes, Mr. Bashwood added the date and address, and directed the letter to his son, at "The Private Inquiry Office, Shadyside Place, London." That done, he went out at once, and posted his letter with his own hands. It was then Monday; and, if the answer was sent by return of post, the answer would be received on Wednesday morning.

The interval day, the Tuesday, was passed by Mr. Bashwood in the steward's office at the great house. He had a double motive for absorbing himself as deeply as might be in the various occupations connected with the management of the estate. In the first place, employment helped him to control the devouring impatience with which he looked for the coming of the next day. In the second place, the more forward he was with the business of the office, the more free he would be to join his son in London, without attracting suspicion to himself by openly neglecting the interests placed under his charge.

Towards the Tuesday afternoon, vague rumours of something wrong at the cottage, found their way (through Major Milroy's servants) to the servants at the great house, and attempted ineffectually through this latter channel to engage the attention of Mr. Bashwood, impenetrably fixed on other things. The major and Miss Neelie had been shut up together in mysteri-

ous conference; and Miss Neelie's appearance after the close of the interview, plainly showed that she had been crying. This had happened on the Monday afternoon; and on the next day (that present Tuesday) the major had startled the household by announcing briefly that his daughter wanted a change to the air of the sea-side, and that he proposed taking her himself, by the next train, to Lowestoft. The two had gone away together, both very serious and silent, but both, apparently, very good friends, for all that. Opinions at the great house attributed this domestic revolution to the reports current on the subject of Allan and Miss Gwilt. Opinions at the cottage rejected that solution of the difficulty, on practical grounds. Miss Neelie had remained inaccessibly shut up in her own room, from the Monday afternoon to the Tuesday morning when her father took her away. The major, during the same interval, had not been outside the door, and had spoken to nobody. And Mrs. Milroy, at the first attempt of her new attendant to inform her of the prevailing scandal in the town, had sealed the servant's lips by flying into one of her terrible passions, the instant Miss Gwilt's name was mentioned. Something must have happened, of course, to take Major Milroy and his daughter so suddenly from home — but that something was certainly not Mr. Armadale's scandalous elopement, in broad daylight, with Miss Gwilt.

The afternoon passed, and the evening passed, and no other event happened but the purely private and personal event which had taken place at the cottage. Nothing occurred (for nothing in the nature of things *could* occur) to dissipate the delusion on which Miss Gwilt had counted — the delusion which all Thorpe-

Ambrose now shared with Mr. Bashwood, that she had gone privately to London with Allan, in the character of Allan's future wife.

On the Wednesday morning, the postman, entering the street in which Mr. Bashwood lived, was encountered by Mr. Bashwood himself, so eager to know if there was a letter for him, that he had come out without his hat. There *was* a letter for him — the letter that he longed for from his vagabond son.

These were the terms in which Bashwood the younger answered his father's supplication for help — after having previously ruined his father's prospects for life: —

"Shadyside Place, Tuesday, July 29.

"My dear Dad, — We have some little practice in dealing with mysteries at this office; but the mystery of your letter beats me altogether. Are you speculating on the interesting hidden frailties of some charming woman? Or, after *your* experience of matrimony, are you actually going to give me a stepmother at this time of day? Whichever it is, upon my life your letter interests me.

"I am not joking, mind, — though the temptation is not an easy one to resist. On the contrary, I have given you a quarter of an hour of my valuable time already. The place you date from sounded somehow familiar to me. I referred back to the memorandum book, and found that I was sent down to Thorpe-Ambrose to make private inquiries not very long since. My employer was a lively old lady, who was too sly to give us her right name and address. As a matter of course, we set to work at once, and found out who she was. Her name is Mrs. Oldershaw — and if you

think of *her* for my stepmother, I strongly recommend you to think again before you make her Mrs. Bashwood.

"If it is not Mrs. Oldershaw, then all I can do, so far, is to tell you how you may find out the unknown lady's address. Come to town yourself, as soon as you get the letter you expect from the gentleman who has gone away with her (I hope he is not a handsome young man, for your sake); and call here. I will send somebody to help you in watching his hotel or lodgings; and if he communicates with the lady, or the lady with him, you may consider her address discovered from that moment. Once let me identify her, and know where she is, — and you shall see all her charming little secrets as plainly as you see the paper on which your affectionate son is now writing to you.

"A word more about the terms. I am as willing as you are to be friends again; but, though I own you were out of pocket by me once, I can't afford to be out of pocket by you. It must be understood that you are answerable for all the expenses of the inquiry. We may have to employ some of the women attached to this office, if your lady is too wide-awake, or too nice-looking, to be dealt with by a man. There will be cab-hire, and postage-stamps — admissions to public amusements, if she is inclined that way — shillings for pew-openers, if she is serious, and takes our people into churches to hear popular preachers, and so on. My own professional services you shall have gratis; but I can't lose by you as well. Only remember that — and you shall have your way. Bygones shall be bygones, and we will forget the past.

"Your affectionate Son,

"JAMES BASHWOOD."

In the ecstasy of seeing help placed at last within his reach, the father put the son's atrocious letter to his lips. "My good boy!" he murmured tenderly. "My dear, good boy!"

He put the letter down, and fell into a new train of thought. The next question to face was the serious question of time. Mr. Pedgift had told him Miss Gwilt might be married in a fortnight. One day of the fourteen had passed already, and another was passing. He beat his hand impatiently on the table at his side, wondering how soon the want of money would force Allan to write to him from London. "To-morrow?" he asked himself. "Or next day?"

The morrow passed; and nothing happened. The next day came — and the letter arrived! It was on business, as he had anticipated; it asked for money, as he had anticipated — and there, at the end of it, in a postscript, was the address added, concluding with the words, "You may count on my staying here till further notice."

He gave one deep gasp of relief; and instantly busied himself — though there were nearly two hours to spare before the train started for London — in packing his bag. The last thing he put in was his blue satin cravat. "She likes bright colours," he said, "and she may see me in it yet!"

CHAPTER XIV.

Miss Gwilt's Diary.

"*All Saints' Terrace, New Road, London, July 28th, Monday night.* — I can hardly hold my head up, I am so tired. But, in my situation, I dare not trust any-

thing to memory. Before I go to bed, I must write my customary record of the events of the day.

"So far, the turn of luck in my favour (it was long enough before it took the turn!) seems likely to continue. I succeeded in forcing Armadale — the brute required nothing short of forcing! — to leave Thorpe-Ambrose for London, alone in the same carriage with me, before all the people in the station. There was a full attendance of dealers in small scandal, all staring hard at us, and all evidently drawing their own conclusions. Either I knew nothing of Thorpe-Ambrose — or the town gossip is busy enough by this time with Mr. Armadale and Miss Gwilt.

"I had some difficulty with him for the first half-hour after we left the station. The guard (delightful man! I felt so grateful to him!) had shut us up together in expectation of half-a-crown at the end of the journey. Armadale was suspicious of me, and he showed it plainly. Little by little I tamed my wild beast — partly by taking care to display no curiosity about his journey to town, and partly by interesting him on the subject of his friend Midwinter; dwelling especially on the opportunity that now offered itself for a reconciliation between them. I kept harping on this string till I set his tongue going, and made him amuse me as a gentleman is bound to do when he has the honour of escorting a lady on a long railway journey.

"What little mind he has was full, of course, of his own affairs and Miss Milroy's. No words can express the clumsiness he showed in trying to talk about himself, without taking me into his confidence or mentioning Miss Milroy's name.

"He was going to London, he gravely informed me, on a matter of indescribable interest to him. It was a secret for the present, but he hoped to tell it me soon; it had made a great difference already in the way in which he looked at the slanders spoken of him in Thorpe-Ambrose; he was too happy to care what the scandal-mongers said of him now, and he should soon stop their mouths by appearing in a new character that would surprise them all. So he blundered on, with the firm persuasion that he was keeping me quite in the dark. It was hard not to laugh, when I thought of my anonymous letter on its way to the major; but I managed to control myself — though, I must own, with some difficulty. As the time wore on, I began to feel a terrible excitement; the position was, I think, a little too much for me. There I was, alone with him, talking in the most innocent, easy, familiar manner, and having it in my mind all the time, to brush his life out of my way, when the moment comes, as I might brush a stain off my gown. It made my blood leap, and my cheeks flush. I caught myself laughing once or twice much louder than I ought — and long before we got to London I thought it desirable to put my face in hiding by pulling down my veil.

"There was no difficulty, on reaching the terminus, in getting him to come in the cab with me to the hotel where Midwinter is staying. He was all eagerness to be reconciled with his dear friend — principally, I have no doubt, because he wants the dear friend to lend a helping hand to the elopement. The real difficulty lay, of course, with Midwinter. My sudden journey to London had allowed me no opportunity of

writing to combat his superstitious conviction that he and his former friend are better apart. I thought it wise to leave Armadale in the cab at the door, and to go into the hotel by myself to pave the way for him.

"Fortunately, Midwinter had not gone out. His delight at seeing me some days sooner than he had hoped, had something infectious in it, I suppose. Pooh! I may own the truth to my own diary! There was a moment when *I* forgot everything in the world but our two selves as completely as he did. I felt as if I was back in my 'teens — until I remembered the lout in the cab at the door. And then I was five-and-thirty again in an instant.

"His face altered when he heard who was below, and what it was I wanted of him — he looked, not angry but distressed. He yielded, however, before long, not to my reasons, for I gave him none, but to my entreaties. His old fondness for his friend might possibly have had some share in persuading him against his will — but my own opinion is that he acted entirely under the influence of his fondness for Me.

"I waited in the sitting-room while he went down to the door; so I knew nothing of what passed between them when they first saw each other again. But oh, the difference between the two men when the interval had passed, and they came upstairs together and joined me.

"They were both agitated, but in such different ways! The hateful Armadale, so loud and red and clumsy; the dear, loveable Midwinter, so pale and quiet, with such a gentleness in his voice when he spoke, and such tenderness in his eyes every time they turned my way. Armadale overlooked me as completely as if I had not been in the room. *He* referred

to me over and over again in the conversation; *he* constantly looked at me to see what I thought, while I sat in my corner silently watching them; *he* wanted to go with me and see me safe to my lodgings, and spare me all trouble with the cabman and the luggage. When I thanked him and declined, Armadale looked unaffectedly relieved at the prospect of seeing my back turned, and of having his friend all to himself. I left him, with his awkward elbows half over the table, scrawling a letter (no doubt to Miss Milroy), and shouting to the waiter that he wanted a bed at the hotel. I had calculated on his staying as a matter of course where he found his friend staying. It was pleasant to find my anticipations realized, and to know that I have as good as got him now under my own eye.

"After promising to let Midwinter know where he could see me to-morrow, I went away in the cab to hunt for lodgings by myself.

"With some difficulty I have succeeded in getting an endurable sitting-room and bedroom in this house, where the people are perfect strangers to me. Having paid a week's rent in advance (for I naturally preferred dispensing with a reference), I find myself with exactly three shillings and ninepence left in my purse. It is impossible to ask Midwinter for money, after he has already paid Mrs. Oldershaw's note-of-hand. I must borrow something to-morrow on my watch and chain at the pawnbroker's. Enough to keep me going for a fortnight is all, and more than all, that I want. In that time, or in less than that time, Midwinter will have married me.

"*July 29th. Two o'clock.* — Early in the morning

I sent a line to Midwinter, telling him that he would find me here at three this afternoon. That done, I devoted the morning to two errands of my own. One is hardly worth mentioning — it was only to raise money on my watch and chain. I got more than I expected; and more (even supposing I buy myself one or two little things in the way of cheap summer dress) than I am at all likely to spend before the wedding-day.

"The other errand was of a far more serious kind. It led me into an attorney's office.

"I was well aware last night (though I was too weary to put it down in my diary), that I could not possibly see Midwinter this morning — in the position he now occupies towards me — without at least *appearing* to take him into my confidence, on the subject of myself and my circumstances. Excepting one necessary consideration which I must be careful not to overlook, there is not the least difficulty in my drawing on my invention, and telling him any story I please — for thus far I have told no story to anybody. Midwinter went away to London before it was possible to approach the subject. As to the Milroys (having provided them with the customary reference), I could fortunately keep them at arm's length on all questions relating purely to myself. And lastly, when I effected my reconciliation with Armadale on the drive in front of the house, he was fool enough to be too generous to let me defend my character. When I had expressed my regret for having lost my temper and threatened Miss Milroy, and when I had accepted his assurance that my pupil had never done or meant to do me any injury, he was too magnanimous to hear a word on the

subject of my private affairs. Thus, I am quite unfettered by any former assertions of my own; and I may tell any story I please — with the one drawback hinted at already in the shape of a restraint. Whatever I may invent in the way of pure fiction, I must preserve the character in which I have appeared at Thorpe-Ambrose — for, with the notoriety that is attached to *my other name*, I have no other choice but to marry Midwinter in my maiden name as 'Miss Gwilt.'

"This was the consideration that took me into the lawyer's office. I felt that I must inform myself, before I saw Midwinter later in the day, of any awkward consequences that may follow the marriage of a widow, if she conceals her widow's name.

"Knowing of no other professional person whom I could trust, I went boldly to the lawyer who had my interests in his charge, at that terrible past time in my life, which I have more reason than ever to shrink from thinking of now. He was astonished, and, as I could plainly detect, by no means pleased to see me. I had hardly opened my lips, before he said he hoped I was not consulting him *again* (with a strong emphasis on the word) on my own account. I took the hint, and put the question I had come to ask, in the interests of that accommodating personage on such occasions — an absent friend. The lawyer evidently saw through it at once; but he was sharp enough to turn my 'friend' to good account on his side. He said he would answer the question as a matter of courtesy towards a lady represented by myself; but he must make it a condition that this consultation of him by deputy should go no further.

"I accepted his terms — for I really respected the clever manner in which he contrived to keep me at arm's length without violating the laws of good breeding. In two minutes I heard what he had to say, mastered it in my own mind, and went out.

"Short as it was, the consultation told me everything I wanted to know. I risk nothing by marrying Midwinter in my maiden instead of my widow's name. The marriage is a good marriage in this way: — that it can only be set aside if my husband finds out the imposture, and takes proceedings to invalidate our marriage in my lifetime. That is the lawyer's answer in the lawyer's own words. It relieves me at once — in this direction at any rate — of all apprehension about the future. The only imposture my husband will ever discover — and then only if he happens to be on the spot — is the imposture that puts me in the place, and gives me the income, of Armadale's widow; and, by that time, I shall have invalidated my own marriage for ever.

"Half-past two! Midwinter will be here in half an hour. I must go and ask my glass how I look. I must rouse my invention, and make up my little domestic romance. Am I feeling nervous about it? Something flutters in the place where my heart used to be. At five-and-thirty, too! and after such a life as mine!

Six o'clock — He has just gone. The day for our marriage is a day determined on already.

"I have tried to rest and recover myself. I can't rest. I have come back to these leaves. There is much to be written in them since Midwinter has been here, that concerns me nearly.

"Let me begin with what I hate most to remember, and so be the sooner done with it — let me begin with the paltry string of falsehoods which I told him about my family troubles.

"What *can* be the secret of this man's hold on me? How is it that he alters me so that I hardly know myself again? I was like myself in the railway carriage yesterday with Armadale. It was surely frightful to be talking to the living man, through the whole of that long journey, with the knowledge in me all the while that I meant to be his widow — and yet I was only excited and fevered. Hour after hour I never shrunk once from speaking to Armadale — but the first trumpery falsehood I told Midwinter, turned me cold when I saw that he believed it! I felt a dreadful hysterical choking in the throat when he entreated me not to reveal my troubles. And once — I am horrified when I think of it — once, when he said, 'If I *could* love you more dearly, I should love you more dearly, now,' I was within a hair's breadth of turning traitor to myself. I was on the very point of crying out to him, 'Lies! all lies! I'm a fiend in human shape! Marry the wretchedest creature that prowls the streets, and you will marry a better woman than me!' Yes! the seeing his eyes moisten, the hearing his voice tremble while I was deceiving him, shook me in that way. I have seen handsomer men by hundreds, cleverer men by dozens. What can this man have roused in me? Is it Love? I thought I *had* loved, never to love again. Does a woman not love, when the man's hardness to her drives her to drown herself? A man drove *me* to that last despair in days gone by. Did all my misery at that time

come from something which was not Love? Have I lived to be five-and-thirty, and am I only feeling, now, what Love really is? — now, when it is too late? Ridiculous! Besides, what is the use of asking? What do I know about it? What does any woman ever know? The more we think of it, the more we deceive ourselves. I wish I had been born an animal. My beauty might have been of some use to me then — it might have got me a good master.

"Here is a whole page of my diary filled; and nothing written yet that is of the slightest use to me! My miserable made-up story must be told over again here, while the incidents are fresh in my memory — or how am I to refer to it consistently on after-occasions when I may be obliged to speak of it again?

"There was nothing new in what I told him: it was the common-place rubbish of the circulating libraries. A dead father; a lost fortune; vagabond brothers, whom I dread ever seeing again; a bedridden mother dependent on my exertions —— No! I can't write it down! I hate myself, I despise myself, when I remember that *he* believed it because I said it — that *he* was distressed by it, because it was my story! I will face the chances of contradicting myself — I will risk discovery and ruin — anything rather than dwell on that contemptible deception of him a moment longer.

"My lies came to an end at last. And then he talked to me of himself, and of his prospects. Oh, what a relief it was to turn to that, at the time! What a relief it is to come to it now!

"He has accepted the offer about which he wrote to me at Thorpe-Ambrose; and he is now engaged as occasional foreign correspondent to the new newspaper.

His first destination is Naples. I wish it had been some other place, for I have certain past associations with Naples which I am not at all anxious to renew. It has been arranged that he is to leave England not later than the eleventh of next month. By that time, therefore, I, who am to go with him, must go with him as his wife.

"There is not the slightest difficulty about the marriage. All this part of it is so easy, that I begin to dread an accident.

"The proposal to keep the thing strictly private—which it might have embarrassed me to make—comes from Midwinter. Marrying me in his own name—the name that he has kept concealed from every living creature but myself and Mr. Brock—it is his interest that not a soul who knows him should be present at the ceremony; his friend Armadale least of all. He has been a week in London already. When another week has passed, he proposes to get the Licence, and to be married in the church belonging to the parish in which the hotel is situated. These are the only necessary formalities. I had but to say 'Yes' (he told me), and to feel no further anxiety about the future. I said 'Yes,' with such a devouring anxiety about the future, that I was afraid he would see it. What minutes the next few minutes were, when he whispered delicious words to me, while I hid my face on his breast!

"I recovered myself first, and led him back to the subject of Armadale; having my own reasons for wanting to know what they said to each other, after I had left them yesterday.

"The manner in which Midwinter replied, showed me that he was speaking under the restraint of respect-

ing a confidence placed in him by his friend. Long before he had done, I detected what the confidence was. Armadale had been consulting him (exactly as I anticipated) on the subject of the elopement. Although he appears to have remonstrated against taking the girl secretly away from her home, Midwinter seems to have felt some delicacy about speaking strongly; remembering (widely different as the circumstances are) that he was contemplating a private marriage himself. I gathered, at any rate, that he had produced very little effect by what he had said; and that Armadale had already carried out his absurd intention of consulting the head clerk in the office of his London lawyers.

"Having got as far as this, Midwinter put the question which I felt must come sooner or later. He asked if I objected to our engagement being mentioned in the strictest secresy to his friend.

"'I will answer," he said, 'for Allan's respecting any confidence that I place in him. And I will undertake, when the time comes, so to use my influence over him as to prevent his being present at the marriage, and discovering (what he must never know) that my name is the same as his own. It would help me,' he went on, 'to speak more strongly about the object that has brought him to London, if I can requite the frankness with which he has spoken of his private affairs to me, by the same frankness on my side.'

"I had no choice but to give the necessary permission, and I gave it. It is of the utmost importance to me to know what course Major Milroy takes with his daughter and Armadale, after receiving my anonymous letter; and, unless I invite Armadale's confidence

in some way, I am nearly certain to be kept in the dark. Let him once be trusted with the knowledge that I am to be Midwinter's wife; and what he tells his friend about his love-affair, he will tell me.

"When it had been understood between us that Armadale was to be taken into our confidence, we began to talk about ourselves again. How the time flew! What a sweet enchantment it was to forget everything in his arms! How he loves me! — ah, poor fellow, how he loves me!

"I have promised to meet him to-morrow morning in the Regent's Park. The less he is seen here the better. The people in this house are strangers to me certainly — but it may be wise to consult appearances, as if I was still at Thorpe-Ambrose, and not to produce the impression, even on their minds, that Midwinter is engaged to me. If any after-inquiries are made, when I have run my grand risk, the testimony of my London landlady might be testimony worth having.

"That wretched old Bashwood! Writing of Thorpe-Ambrose reminds me of him. What will he say when the town-gossip tells him that Armadale has taken me to London, in a carriage reserved for ourselves? It really is too absurd in a man of Bashwood's age and appearance to presume to be in love! . . . .

"*July* 30*th*. — News at last! Armadale has heard from Miss Milroy. My anonymous letter has produced its effect. The girl is removed from Thorpe-Ambrose already; and the whole project of the elopement is blown to the winds at once and for ever. This was the substance of what Midwinter had to tell me, when I met him in the Park. I affected to be excessively

astonished, and to feel the necessary feminine longing to know all the particulars. 'Not that I expect to have my curiosity satisfied,' I added, 'for Mr. Armadale and I are little better than mere acquaintances, after all.'

"'You are far more than a mere acquaintance in Allan's eyes,' said Midwinter. 'Having your permission to trust him, I have already told him how near and dear you are to me.'

"Hearing this, I thought it desirable, before I put any questions about Miss Milroy, to attend to my own interests first, and to find out what effect the announcement of my coming marriage had produced on Armadale. It was possible that he might be still suspicious of me, and that the inquiries he made in London, at Mrs. Milroy's instigation, might be still hanging on his mind.

"'Did Mr. Armadale seem surprised,' I asked, 'when you told him of our engagement, and when you said it was to be kept a secret from everybody?"

"'He seemed greatly surprised,' said Midwinter, 'to hear that we were going to be married. All he said when I told him it must be kept a secret was, that he supposed there were reasons on your side for making the marriage a private one.'

"'What did you say,' I inquired, 'when he made that remark?'

"'I said the reasons were on my side,' answered Midwinter. 'And I thought it right to add — considering that Allan had allowed himself to be misled by the ignorant distrust of you at Thorpe-Ambrose — that you had confided to me the whole of your sad family story, and that you had amply justified your unwilling-

ness, under any ordinary circumstances, to speak of your private affairs.'

('I breathed freely again. He had said just what was wanted, just in the right way.)

"'Thank you,' I said, for putting me right in your friend's estimation. Does he wish to see me?' I added, by way of getting back to the other subject of Miss Milroy and the elopement.

"He is longing to see you, returned Midwinter. 'He is in great distress, poor fellow — distress which I have done my best to soothe, but which I believe would yield far more readily to a woman's sympathy than to mine.'

"'Where is he now?' I asked.

"He was at the hotel; and to the hotel I instantly proposed that we should go. It is a busy, crowded place; and (with my veil down) I have less fear of compromising myself there than at my quiet lodgings. Besides, it is vitally important to me to know what Armadale does next, under this total change of circumstances, — for I must so control his proceedings as to get him away from England if I can. We took a cab: such was my eagerness to sympathize with the heart-broken lover, that we took a cab!

"Anything so ridiculous as Armadale's behaviour under the double shock of discovering that his young lady has been taken away from him, and that I am to be married to Midwinter, I never before witnessed in all my experience. To say that he was like a child, is a libel on all children who are not born idiots. He congratulated me on my coming marriage, and execrated the unknown wretch who had written the anonymous letter, little thinking that he was speaking of

one and the same person in one and the same breath. Now he submissively acknowledged that Major Milroy had his rights as a father, and now he reviled the major as having no feeling for anything but his mechanics and his clock. At one moment he started up, with the tears in his eyes, and declared that his 'darling Neelie' was an angel on earth. At another he sat down sulkily, and thought that a girl of her spirit might have run away on the spot and joined him in London. After a good half-hour of this absurd exhibition, I succeeded in quieting him; and then a few words of tender inquiry produced what I had expressly come to the hotel to see — Miss Milroy's letter.

"It was outrageously long and rambling and confused — in short, the letter of a fool. I had to wade through plenty of vulgar sentiment and lamentation, and to lose time and patience over maudlin outbursts of affection, and nauseous kisses enclosed in circles of ink. However, I contrived to extract the information I wanted at last; and here it is: —

"The major, on receipt of my anonymous warning, appears to have sent at once for his daughter, and to have shown her the letter. 'You know what a hard life I lead with your mother; don't make it harder still, Neelie, by deceiving me.' That was all the poor old gentleman said. I always did like the major; and, though he was afraid to show it, I know he always liked me. His appeal to his daughter (if *her* account of it is to be believed) cut her to the heart. She burst out crying (let her alone for crying at the right moment!) and confessed everything.

"After giving her time to recover herself (if he had

given her a good box on the ears it would have been more to the purpose!) the major seems to have put certain questions, and to have become convinced (as I was convinced myself) that his daughter's heart, or fancy, or whatever she calls it, was really and truly set on Armadale. The discovery evidently distressed as well as surprised him. He appears to have hesitated, and to have maintained his own unfavourable opinion of Miss Neelie's lover for some little time. But his daughter's tears and entreaties (so like the weakness of the dear old gentleman!) shook him at last. Though he firmly refused to allow of any marriage engagement at present, he consented to overlook the clandestine meetings in the park, and to put Armadale's fitness to become his son-in-law to the test, on certain conditions.

"These conditions are, that for the next six months to come, all communication is to be broken off, both personally and by writing, between Armadale and Miss Milroy. That space of time is to be occupied by the young gentleman as he himself thinks best, and by the young lady in completing her education at school. If, when the six months have passed, they are both still of the same mind, and if Armadale's conduct in the interval has been such as to improve the major's opinion of him, he will be allowed to present himself in the character of Miss Milroy's suitor — and, in six months more, if all goes well, the marriage may take place.

"I declare I could kiss the dear old major, if I was only within reach of him! If I had been at his elbow, and had dictated the conditions myself, I could have asked for nothing better than this. Six months of total separation between Armadale and Miss Milroy! In half that time — with all communication cut off be-

tween the two — it must go hard with me indeed if I don't find myself dressed in the necessary mourning, and publicly recognized as Armadale's widow.

"But I am forgetting the girl's letter. She gives her father's reasons for making his conditions, in her father's own words. The major seems to have spoken so sensibly and so feelingly that he left his daughter no decent alternative — and he leaves Armadale no decent alternative — but to submit. As well as I can remember he seems to have expressed himself to Miss Neelie in these, or nearly in these terms: —

"'Don't think I am behaving cruelly to you, my dear — I am merely asking you to put Mr. Armadale to the proof. It is not only right, it is absolutely necessary, that you should hold no communication with him for some time to come; and I will show you why. In the first place if you go to school, the necessary rules in such places — necessary for the sake of the other girls — would not permit you to see Mr. Armadale, or to receive letters from him; and, if you *are* to become mistress of Thorpe-Ambrose, to school you must go, for you would be ashamed, and I should be ashamed, if you occupied the position of a lady of station, without having the accomplishments which all ladies of station are expected to possess. In the second place, I want to see whether Mr. Armadale will continue to think of you as he thinks now, without being encouraged in his attachment by seeing you, or reminded of it by hearing from you. If I am wrong in thinking him flighty and unreliable; and if your opinion of him is the right one, this is not putting the young man to an unfair test — true love survives much longer separations than a separation of six months. And when that

time is over, and well over; and when I have had him under my own eye for another six months, and have learnt to think as highly of him as you do — even then, my dear, after all that terrible delay, you will still be a married woman before you are eighteen. Think of this, Neelie; and show that you love me and trust me, by accepting my proposal. I will hold no communication with Mr. Armadale myself. I will leave it to you to write and tell him what has been decided on. He may write back one letter, and one only, to acquaint you with his decision. After that, for the sake of your reputation, nothing more is to be said, and nothing more is to be done, and the matter is to be kept strictly private until the six months' interval is at an end.'

"To this effect the major spoke. His behaviour to that little slut of a girl has produced a stronger impression on me than anything else in the letter. It has set me thinking (me, of all the people in the world!) of what they call 'a moral difficulty.' We are perpetually told that there can be no possible connection between virtue and vice. Can there not? Here is Major Milroy doing exactly what an excellent father, at once kind and prudent, affectionate and firm, would do under the circumstances — and by that very course of conduct, he has now smoothed the way for *me*, as completely as if he had been the chosen accomplice of that abominable creature, Miss Gwilt. Only think of my reasoning in this way! But I am in such good spirits, I can do anything to-day. I have not looked so bright and so young as I look now, for months past!

"To return to the letter, for the last time — it is so excessively dull and stupid that I really can't help

wandering away from it into reflections of my own, as a mere relief.

"After solemnly announcing that she meant to sacrifice herself to her beloved father's wishes (the brazen assurance of her setting up for a martyr after what has happened, exceeds anything I ever heard or read of!), Miss Neelie next mentioned that the major proposed taking her to the seaside for change of air, during the few days that were still to elapse before she went to school. Armadale was to send his answer by return of post, and to address her, under cover to her father, at Lowestoft. With this, and with a last outburst of tender protestation, crammed crookedly into a corner of the page, the letter ended. (N. B. — The major's object in taking her to the seaside is plain enough. He still privately distrusts Armadale, and he is wisely determined to prevent any more clandestine meetings in the park, before the girl is safely disposed of at school.)

"When I had done with the letter — I had requested permission to read parts of it which I particularly admired, for the second and third time! — we all consulted together in a friendly way about what Armadale was to do.

"He was fool enough, at the outset, to protest against submitting to Major Milroy's conditions. He declared, with his odious red face looking the picture of brute health, that he should never survive a six months' separation from his beloved Neelie. Midwinter (as may easily be imagined) seemed a little ashamed of him, and joined me in bringing him to his senses. We showed him what would have been plain enough

to anybody but a booby, that there was no honourable, or even decent alternative left but to follow the example of submission set by the young lady. 'Wait — and you will have her for your wife,' was what I said. 'Wait — and you will force the major to alter his unjust opinion of you,' was what Midwinter added. With two clever people hammering common sense into his head at that rate, it is needless to say that his head gave way, and he submitted.

"Having decided him to accept the major's conditions (I was careful to warn him, before he wrote to Miss Milroy, that my engagement to Midwinter was to be kept as strictly secret from her as from everybody else), the next question we had to settle related to his future proceedings. I was ready with the necessary arguments to stop him, if he had proposed returning to Thorpe-Ambrose. But he proposed nothing of the sort. On the contrary, he declared, of his own accord, that nothing would induce him to go back. The place and the people were associated with everything that was hateful to him. There would be no Miss Milroy now to meet him in the park, and no Midwinter to keep him company in the solitary house. 'I'd rather break stones on the road,' was the sensible and cheerful way in which he put it, 'than go back to Thorpe-Ambrose.'

"The first suggestion after this came from Midwinter. The sly old clergyman who gave Mrs. Oldershaw and me so much trouble, has it seems been ill; but has been latterly reported better. 'Why not go to Somersetshire,' said Midwinter; 'and see your good friend, and my good friend, Mr. Brock?'

"Armadale caught at the proposal readily enough.

He longed, in the first place, to see 'dear old Brock,' and he longed, in the second place, to see his yacht. After staying a few days more in London with Midwinter, he would gladly go to Somersetshire. But what after that?

"Seeing my opportunity, *I* came to the rescue this time. 'You have got a yacht, Mr. Armadale,' I said; 'and you know that Midwinter is going to Italy. When you are tired of Somersetshire, why not make a voyage to the Mediterranean, and meet your friend, and your friend's wife, at Naples?'

"I made the allusion to 'his friend's wife,' with the most becoming modesty and confusion. Armadale was enchanted. I had hit on the best of all ways of occupying the weary time. He started up, and wrung my hand in quite an ecstasy of gratitude. How I do hate people who can only express their feelings by hurting other people's hands!

"Midwinter was as pleased with my proposal as Armadale; but he saw difficulties in the way of carrying it out. He considered the yacht too small for a cruise to the Mediterranean, and he thought it desirable to hire a larger vessel. His friend thought otherwise. I left them arguing the question. It was quite enough for me to have made sure, in the first place, that Armadale will not return to Thorpe-Ambrose; and to have decided him, in the second place, on going abroad. He may go how he likes. I should prefer the small yacht myself — for there seems to be a chance that the small yacht might do me the inestimable service of drowning him. . . . .

"*Five o'clock.* — The excitement of feeling that I

had got Armadale's future movements completely under my own control, made me so restless, when I returned to my lodgings, that I was obliged to go out again, and do something. A new interest to occupy me being what I wanted, I went to Pimlico to have it out with Mother Oldershaw.

"I walked — and made up my mind, on the way, that I would begin by quarrelling with her.

"One of my notes-of-hand being paid already, and Midwinter being willing to pay the other two when they fall due, my present position with the old wretch is as independent a one as I could desire. I always get the better of her when it comes to a downright battle between us, and find her wonderfully civil and obliging the moment I have made her feel that mine is the strongest will of the two. In my present situation, she might be of use to me in various ways, if I could secure her assistance, without trusting her with secrets which I am now more than ever determined to keep to myself. That was my idea as I walked to Pimlico. Upsetting Mother Oldershaw's nerves, in the first place, and then twisting her round my little finger, in the second, promised me, as I thought, an interesting occupation for the rest of the afternoon.

"When I got to Pimlico, a surprise was in store for me. The house was shut up — not only on Mrs. Oldershaw's side, but on Doctor Downward's as well. A padlock was on the shop-door; and a man was hanging about on the watch, who might have been an ordinary idler certainly, but who looked, to my mind, like a policeman in disguise.

"Knowing the risks the doctor runs, in his particular form of practice, I suspected at once that something

serious had happened, and that even cunning Mrs. Oldershaw was compromised this time. Without stopping, or making any inquiry, therefore, I called the first cab that passed me, and drove to the post-office to which I had desired my letters to be forwarded if any came for me after I left my Thorpe-Ambrose lodging.

"On inquiry a letter was produced for 'Miss Gwilt.' It was in Mother Oldershaw's handwriting, and it told me (as I had supposed) that the doctor had got into a serious difficulty — that she was herself most unfortunately mixed up in the matter — and that they were both in hiding for the present. The letter ended with some sufficiently venomous sentences about my conduct at Thorpe-Ambrose, and with a warning that I have not heard the last of Mrs. Oldershaw yet. It relieved me to find her writing in this way — for she would have been civil and cringing if she had had any suspicion of what I have really got in view. I burnt the letter as soon as the candles came up. And there, for the present, is an end of the connection between Mother Jezebel and me. I must do all my own dirty work now — and I shall be all the safer, perhaps, for trusting nobody's hands to do it but my own.

"*July* 31*st.* — More useful information for me. I met Midwinter again in the Park (on the pretext that my reputation might suffer, if he called too often at my lodgings); and heard the last news of Armadale since I left the hotel yesterday.

"After he had written to Miss Milroy, Midwinter took the opportunity of speaking to him about the necessary business arrangements during his absence from the great house. It was decided that the servants

should be put on board wages, and that Mr. Bashwood should be left in charge. (Somehow, I don't like this reappearance of Mr. Bashwood in connection with my present interests, but there is no help for it.) The next question — the question of money — was settled at once by Mr. Armadale himself. All his available ready-money (a large sum) is to be lodged by Mr. Bashwood in Coutts's Bank, and to be there deposited in Armadale's name. This, he said, would save him the worry of any further letter-writing to his steward, and would enable him to get what he wanted, when he went abroad, at a moment's notice. The plan thus proposed being certainly the simplest and the safest, was adopted with Midwinter's full concurrence; and here the business discussion would have ended, if the everlasting Mr. Bashwood had not turned up again in the conversation, and prolonged it in an entirely new direction.

"On reflection, it seems to have struck Midwinter that the whole responsibility at Thorpe-Ambrose ought not to rest on Mr. Bashwood's shoulders. Without in the least distrusting him, Midwinter felt, nevertheless, that he ought to have somebody set over him, to apply to, in case of emergency. Armadale made no objection to this; he only asked, in his helpless way, who the person was to be?

"The answer was not an easy one to arrive at.

"Either of the two solicitors at Thorpe-Ambrose might have been employed — but Armadale was on bad terms with both of them. Any reconciliation with such a bitter enemy as the elder lawyer, Mr. Darch, was out of the question; and reinstating Mr. Pedgift in his former position, implied a tacit sanction on Arma-

dale's part, of the lawyer's abominable conduct towards *me*, which was scarcely consistent with the respect and regard that he felt for a lady who was soon to be his friend's wife. After some further discussion, Midwinter hit on a new suggestion which appeared to meet the difficulty. He proposed that Armadale should write to a respectable solicitor at Norwich, stating his position in general terms, and requesting that gentleman to act as Mr. Bashwood's adviser and superintendent when occasion required. Norwich being within an easy railway ride of Thorpe-Ambrose, Armadale saw no objection to the proposal, and promised to write to the Norwich lawyer. Fearing that he might make some mistake, if he wrote without assistance, Midwinter had drawn him out a draft of the necessary letter, and Armadale was now engaged in copying the draft, and also in writing to Mr. Bashwood to lodge the money immediately in Coutts's Bank.

"These details are so dry and uninteresting in themselves, that I hesitated at first about putting them down in my diary. But a little reflection has convinced me that they are too important to be passed over. Looked at from my point of view, they mean this — that Armadale's own act is now cutting him off from all communication with Thorpe-Ambrose, even by letter. *He is as good as dead already, to everybody he leaves behind him.* The causes which have led to such a result as that, are causes which certainly claim the best place I can give them in these pages.

"*August 1st.* — Nothing to record, but that I have had a long quiet, happy day with Midwinter. He hired a carriage, and we drove to Richmond, and

dined there. After to-day's experience, it is impossible to deceive myself any longer. Come what may of it, I love him.

"I have fallen into low spirits since he left me. A persuasion has taken possession of my mind, that the smooth and prosperous course of my affairs since I have been in London, is too smooth and prosperous to last. There is something oppressing me to-night, which is more than the oppression of the heavy London air.

"*August 2nd. Three o'clock.* — My presentiments, like other people's, have deceived me often enough — but I am almost afraid that my presentiment of last night was really prophetic, for once in a way.

"I went after breakfast to a milliner's in this neighbourhood to order a few cheap summer things, and thence to Midwinter's hotel to arrange with him for another day in the country. I drove to the milliner's, and to the hotel, and part of the way back. Then, feeling disgusted with the horrid close smell of the cab (somebody had been smoking in it, I suppose), I got out to walk the rest of the way. Before I had been two minutes on my feet, I discovered that I was being followed by a strange man.

"This may mean nothing but that an idle fellow has been struck by my figure and my appearance generally. My face could have made no impression on him — for it was hidden as usual by my veil. Whether he followed me (in a cab of course) from the milliner's, or from the hotel, I cannot say. Nor am I quite certain whether he did or did not track me to this door. I only know that I lost sight of

him before I got back. There is no help for it but to wait till events enlighten me. If there is anything serious in what has happened, I shall soon discover it.

"*Five o'clock.* — It *is* serious. Ten minutes since, I was in my bed-room, which communicates with the sitting-room. I was just coming out, when I heard a strange voice on the landing outside — a woman's voice. The next instant the sitting-room door was suddenly opened; the woman's voice said, 'Are these the apartments you have got to let?' — and though the landlady, behind her, answered, 'No! higher up, ma'am,' the woman came on straight to my bed-room, as if she had not heard. I had just time to slam the door in her face before she saw me. The necessary explanations and apologies followed between the landlady and the stranger in the sitting-room — and then I was left alone again.

"I have no time to write more. It is plain that somebody has an interest in trying to identify me, and that, but for my own quickness, the strange woman would have accomplished this object by taking me by surprise. She and the man who followed me in the street are, I suspect, in league together; and there is probably somebody in the background whose interests they are serving. Is Mother Oldershaw attacking me in the dark? or who else can it be? No matter who it is; my present situation is too critical to be trifled with. I must get away from this house to-night, and leave no trace behind me by which I can be followed to another place.

"*August 3rd.* — *Gary Street, Tottenham Court Road.*

— I got away last night (after writing an excuse to Midwinter, in which 'my invalid mother' figured as the all-sufficient cause of my disappearance); and I have found refuge here. It has cost me some money; but my object is attained! Nobody can possibly have traced me from All Saints' Terrace to this address.

"After paying my landlady the necessary forfeit for leaving her without notice, I arranged with her son that he should take my boxes in a cab to the cloak-room at the nearest railway-station, and send me the ticket in a letter, to wait my application for it at the post-office. While he went his way in one cab, I went mine in another, with a few things for the night in my little hand-bag.

"I drove straight to the milliner's shop — which I had observed, when I was there yesterday, had a back entrance into a mews, for the apprentices to go in and out by. I went in at once, leaving the cab waiting for me at the door. 'A man is following me,' I said; 'and I want to get rid of him. Here is my cab-fare; wait ten minutes before you give it to the driver, and let me out at once by the back way!' In a moment I was out in the mews — in another, I was in the next street — in a third, I hailed a passing omnibus, and was a free woman again.

"Having now cut off all communication between me and my last lodgings, the next precaution (in case Midwinter or Armadale are watched) is to cut off all communication, for some days to come, at least, between me and the hotel. I have written to Midwinter — making my supposititious mother once more the excuse — to say that I am tied to my nursing duties,

and that we must communicate by writing only for the present. Doubtful as I still am of who my hidden enemy really is, I can do no more to defend myself than I have done now.

"*August 4th.* — The two friends at the hotel have both written to me. Midwinter expresses his regret at our separation, in the tenderest terms. Armadale writes an entreaty for help under very awkward circumstances. A letter from Major Milroy has been forwarded to him from the great house, and he encloses it in his letter to me.

"Having left the seaside, and placed his daughter safely at the school originally chosen for her (in the neighbourhood of Ely), the major appears to have returned to Thorpe-Ambrose at the close of last week; to have heard then, for the first time, the reports about Armadale and me; and to have written instantly to Armadale to tell him so.

"The letter is stern and short. Major Milroy dismisses the report as unworthy of credit, because it is impossible for him to believe in such an act of 'cold-blooded treachery,' as the scandal would imply, if the scandal were true. He simply writes to warn Armadale that, if he is not more careful in his actions for the future, he must resign all pretensions to Miss Milroy's hand. 'I neither expect, nor wish for, an answer to this' (the letter ends), 'for I desire to receive no mere protestations in words. By your conduct, and by your conduct alone, I shall judge you as time goes on. Let me also add, that I positively forbid you to consider this letter as an excuse for violating the terms agreed on between us, by writing again to my

daughter. You have no need to justify yourself in her eyes — for I fortunately removed her from Thorpe-Ambrose before this abominable report had time to reach her; and I shall take good care, for her sake, that she is not agitated and unsettled by hearing it where she is now.'

"Armadale's petition to me, under these circumstances, entreats (as I am the innocent cause of the new attack on his character), that I will write to the major to absolve him of all indiscretion in the matter, and to say that he could not, in common politeness, do otherwise than accompany me to London.

"I forgive the impudence of his request, in consideration of the news that he sends me. It is certainly another circumstance in my favour, that the scandal at Thorpe-Ambrose is not to be allowed to reach Miss Milroy's ears. With her temper (if she did hear it) she might do something desperate in the way of claiming her lover, and might compromise me seriously. As for my own course with Armadale, it is easy enough. I shall quiet him by promising to write to Major Milroy; and I shall take the liberty, in my own private interests, of not keeping my word.

"Nothing in the least suspicious has happened to-day. Whoever my enemies are, they have lost me, and between this and the time when I leave England they shall not find me again. I have been to the post-office, and have got the ticket for my luggage enclosed to me in a letter from All Saints' Terrace as I directed. The luggage itself I shall still leave at the cloak-room, until I see the way before me more clearly than I see it now.

August 5th. — Two letters again from the hotel. Midwinter writes to remind me, in the prettiest possible manner, that he will have lived long enough in the parish by to-morrow to be able to get our marriage license, and that he proposes applying for it in the usual way at Doctors' Commons. Now, if I am ever to say it, is the time to say No. I can't say No. There is the plain truth — and there is an end of it!

"Armadale's letter is a letter of farewell. He thanks me for my kindness in consenting to write to the major, and bids me good-by till we meet again at Naples. He has learnt from his friend that there are private reasons which will oblige him to forbid himself the pleasure of being present at our marriage. Under these circumstances, there is nothing to keep him in London. He has made all his business arrangements; he goes to Somersetshire by to-night's train; and, after staying some time with Mr. Brock, he will sail for the Mediterranean from the Bristol Channel (in spite of Midwinter's objections) in his own yacht.

"The letter encloses a jeweller's box, with a ring in it — Armadale's present to me on my marriage. It is a ruby — but rather a small one, and set in the worst possible taste. He would have given Miss Milroy a ring worth ten times the money, if it had been *her* marriage present. There is no more hateful creature, in my opinion, than a miserly young man. I wonder whether his trumpery little yacht will drown him?

"I am so excited and fluttered, I hardly know what I am writing. Not that I shrink from what is coming — I only feel as if I was being hurried on

faster than I quite like to go. At this rate, if nothing happens, Midwinter will have married me, by the end of the week. And then — !

"*August 6th.* — If anything could startle me now, I should feel startled by the news that has reached me to-day.

"On his return to the hotel this morning, after getting the Marriage Licence, Midwinter found a telegram waiting for him. It contained an urgent message from Armadale, announcing that Mr. Brock had had a relapse, and that all hope of his recovery was pronounced by the doctors to be at an end. By the dying man's own desire, Midwinter was summoned to take leave of him, and was entreated by Armadale not to lose a moment in starting for the rectory by the first train.

"The hurried letter which tells me this, tells me also that, by the time I receive it, Midwinter will be on his way to the west. He promises to write at greater length, after he has seen Mr. Brock, by to-night's post.

"This news has an interest for me, which Midwinter little suspects. There is but one human creature, besides myself, who knows the secret of his birth and his name — and that one, is the old man who now lies waiting for him at the point of death. What will they say to each other at the last moment? Will some chance word take them back to the time when I was in Mrs. Armadale's service at Madeira? Will they speak of Me?

"*August 7th.* — The promised letter has just reached me. No parting words have been exchanged

between them — it was all over before Midwinter reached Somersetshire. Armadale met him at the rectory gate with the news that Mr. Brock was dead.

"I try to struggle against it, but, coming after the strange complication of circumstances that has been closing round me for weeks past, there is something in this latest event of all that shakes my nerves. But one last chance of detection stood in my way when I opened my diary yesterday. When I open it to-day, that chance is removed by Mr. Brock's death. It means something; I wish I knew what.

"The funeral is to be on Saturday morning. Midwinter will attend it as well as Armadale. But he proposes returning to London first; and he writes word that he will call to-night, in the hope of seeing me on his way from the station to the hotel. Even if there was any risk in it, I should see him, as things are now. But there is no risk if he comes here from the station, instead of coming from the hotel.

"*Five o'clock.* — I was not mistaken in believing that my nerves were all unstrung. Trifles that would not have cost me a second thought at other times, weigh heavily on my mind now.

"Two hours since, in despair of knowing how to get through the day, I bethought myself of the milliner who is making my summer dress. I had intended to go and try it on yesterday — but it slipped out of my memory, in the excitement of hearing about Mr. Brock. So I went this afternoon, eager to do anything that might help me to get rid of myself. I have returned, feeling more uneasy and more depressed than I felt when I went out — for I have come back, fearing

that I may yet have reason to repent not having left my unfinished dress on the milliner's hands.

"Nothing happened to me, this time, in the street. It was only in the trying-on room that my suspicions were roused; and, there, it certainly did cross my mind that the attempt to discover me, which I defeated at All Saints' Terrace, was not given up yet, and that some of the shopwomen had been tampered with, if not the mistress herself.

"Can I give myself anything in the shape of a reason for this impression? Let me think a little.

"I certainly noticed two things which were out of the ordinary routine, under the circumstances. In the first place, there were twice as many women as were needed in the trying-on room. This looked suspicious — and yet, I might have accounted for it in more ways than one. Is it not the slack time now? and don't I know by experience that I am the sort of woman about whom other women are always spitefully curious? I thought again, in the second place, that one of the assistants persisted rather oddly in keeping me turned in a particular direction, with my face towards the glazed and curtained door that led into the work-room. But, after all, she gave a reason, when I asked for it. She said the light fell better on me that way — and, when I looked round, there was the window to prove her right. Still, these trifles produced such an effect on me, at the time, that I purposely found fault with the dress, so as to have an excuse for trying it on again, before I told them where I lived, and had it sent home. Pure fancy, I dare say. Pure fancy, perhaps, at the present moment. I don't care

— I shall act on instinct (as they say), and give up the dress. In plainer words still, I won't go back.

"*Midnight.* — Midwinter came to see me as he promised. An hour has passed since we said good-night; and here I still sit, with my pen in my hand, thinking of him. No words of mine can describe what has passed between us. The end of it is all I can write in these pages — and the end of it is, that he has shaken my resolution. For the first time since I saw the easy way to Armadale's life at Thorpe-Ambrose, I feel as if the man whom I have doomed in my own thoughts, had a chance of escaping me.

"Is it my love for Midwinter that has altered me? Or is it *his* love for *me* that has taken possession, not only of all I wish to give him, but of all I wish to keep from him as well? I feel as if I had lost myself — lost myself, I mean, in *him* — all through the evening. He was in great agitation about what had happened in Somersetshire — and he made me feel as disheartened and as wretched about it as he did. Though he never confessed it in words, I know that Mr. Brock's death has startled him as an ill-omen for our marriage — I know it, because I feel Mr. Brock's death as an ill-omen too. The superstition — *his* superstition — took so strong a hold on me, that when we grew calmer, and he spoke of the future — when he told me that he must either break his engagement with his new employers, or go abroad, as he is pledged to go, on Monday next — I actually shrank at the thought of our marriage following close on Mr. Brock's funeral; I actually said to him, in the impulse of the moment,

'Go, and begin your new life alone! go, and leave me here to wait for happier times.'

"He took me in his arms. He sighed, and kissed me with an angelic tenderness. He said — oh, so softly and so sadly! — 'I have no life now, apart from *you*.' As those words passed his lips, the thought seemed to rise in my mind like an echo, 'Why not live out all the days that are left to me, happy and harmless in a love like this!' I can't explain it — I can't realize it. That was the thought in me at the time; and that is the thought in me still. I see my own hand while I write the words — and I ask myself whether it is really the hand of Lydia Gwilt!

"Armadale ——

"No! I will never write, I will never think of Armadale again.

"Yes! Let me write once more — let me think once more of him, because it quiets me to know that he is going away, and that the sea will have parted us before I am married. His old home is home to him no longer, now that the loss of his mother has been followed by the loss of his best and earliest friend. When the funeral is over, he has decided to sail the same day for the foreign seas. We may, or we may not, meet at Naples. Shall I be an altered woman, if we do? I wonder; I wonder!

"*August 8th.* — A line from Midwinter. He has gone back to Somersetshire to be in readiness for the funeral to-morrow; and he will return here (after bidding Armadale good-by) to-morrow evening.

"The last forms and ceremonies preliminary to our marriage have been complied with. I am, to be his

wife, on Monday next. The hour must not be later than half-past ten — which will give us just time, when the service is over, to get from the church door to the railway, and to start on our journey to Naples the same day.

"To-day — Saturday — Sunday! I am not afraid of the time; the time will pass. I am not afraid of myself, if I can only keep all thoughts but one out of my mind. I love him! Day and night, till Monday comes, I will think of nothing but that. I love him!

"*Four o'clock.* — Other thoughts are forced into my mind in spite of me. My suspicions of yesterday were no mere fancies; the milliner *has* been tampered with. My folly in going back to her house has led to my being traced here. I am absolutely certain that I never gave the woman my address — and yet my new gown was sent home to me at two o'clock to-day!

"A man brought it with the bill, and a civil message, to say that, as I had not called at the appointed time to try it on again, the dress had been finished and sent to me. He caught me in the passage; I had no choice but to pay the bill, and dismiss him. Any other proceeding, as events have now turned out, would have been pure folly. The messenger (not the man who followed me in the street, but another spy sent to look at me beyond all doubt) would have declared he knew nothing about it, if I had spoken to him. The milliner would tell me to my face, if I went to her, that I had given her my address. The one useful thing to do now, is to set my wits to work in the interests of my own security, and to step out of the false position in which my own rashness has placed me — if I can.

"*Seven o'clock.* — My spirits have risen again. I believe I am in a fair way of extricating myself already.

"I have just come back from a long round in a cab. First, to the cloak-room of the Great Western, to get the luggage which I sent there from All Saints' Terrace. Next, to the cloak-room of the South Eastern, to leave my luggage (labelled in Midwinter's name), to wait for me till the starting of the tidal train on Monday. Next, to the General Post Office, to post a letter to Midwinter at the rectory, which he will receive to-morrow morning. Lastly, back again to this house — from which I shall move no more till Monday comes.

"My letter to Midwinter will, I have little doubt, lead to his seconding (quite innocently) the precautions that I am taking for my own safety. The shortness of the time at our disposal, on Monday, will oblige him to pay his bill at the hotel and to remove his luggage, before the marriage ceremony takes place. All I ask him to do beyond this, is to take the luggage himself to the South Eastern (so as to make any inquiries useless which may address themselves to the servants at the hotel) — and, that done, to meet me at the church door, instead of calling for me here. The rest concerns nobody but myself. When Sunday night or Monday morning comes, it will be hard indeed — freed as I am now from all encumbrances — if I can't give the people who are watching me the slip for the second time.

"It seems needless enough to have written to Midwinter to-day, when he is coming back to me to-morrow night. But it was impossible to ask, what I have been obliged to ask of him, without making my false

family circumstances once more the excuse; and having this to do — I must own the truth — I wrote to him because, after what I suffered on the last occasion, I can never again deceive him to his face.

"*August 9th.* — *Two o'clock.* — I rose early this morning, more depressed in spirits than usual. The re-beginning of one's life, at the re-beginning of every day, has already been something weary and hopeless to me for years past. I dreamt too all through the night — not of Midwinter and of my married life, as I had hoped to dream — but of the wretched conspiracy to discover me, by which I have been driven from one place to another, like a hunted animal. Nothing in the shape of a new revelation enlightened me in my sleep. All I could guess, dreaming, was what I had guessed waking, that Mother Oldershaw is the enemy who is attacking me in the dark.

"My restless night has, however, produced one satisfactory result. It has led to my winning the good graces of the servant here, and securing all the assistance she can give me when the time comes for making my escape.

"The girl noticed this morning that I looked pale and anxious. I took her into my confidence, to the extent of telling her that I was privately engaged to be married, and that I had enemies who were trying to part me from my sweetheart. This instantly roused her sympathy — and a present of a ten-shilling piece for her kind services to me did the rest. In the intervals of her house-work she has been with me nearly the whole morning; and I found out, among other things, that *her* sweetheart is a private soldier in the

Guards, and that she expects to see him to-morrow. I have got money enough left, little as it is, to turn the head of any Private in the British army — and, if the person appointed to watch me to-morrow is a man, I think it just possible that he may find his attention disagreeably diverted from Miss Gwilt in the course of the evening.

"When Midwinter came here last from the railway, he came at half-past eight. How am I to get through the weary, weary hours between this and the evening? I think I shall darken my bedroom, and drink the blessing of oblivion from my bottle of Drops.

"*Eleven o'clock.* — We have parted for the last time before the day comes that makes us man and wife.

"He has left me, as he left me before, with an absorbing subject of interest to think of in his absence. I noticed a change in him the moment he entered the room. When he told me of the funeral, and of his parting with Armadale on board the yacht, though he spoke with feelings deeply moved, he spoke with a mastery over himself which is new to me in my experience of him. It was the same when our talk turned next on our own hopes and prospects. He was plainly disappointed when he found that my family embarrassments would prevent our meeting to-morrow, and plainly uneasy at the prospect of leaving me to find my way by myself on Monday to the church. But there was a certain hopefulness and composure of manner underlying it all, which produced so strong an impression on me that I was obliged to notice it.

"'You know what odd fancies take possession of

me sometimes,' I said. 'Shall I tell you the fancy that has taken possession of me now? I can't help thinking that something has happened since we last saw each other, which you have not told me yet.'

"'Something *has* happened,' he answered. 'And it is something which you ought to know.'

"With those words he took out his pocket-book, and produced two written papers from it. One he looked at and put back. The other he placed on the table.

"'Before I tell you what this is, and how it came into my possession,' he said, 'I must own something that I have concealed from you. It is no more serious confession than the confession of my own weakness.'

"He then acknowledged to me, that the renewal of his friendship with Armadale had been clouded, through the whole period of their intercourse in London, by his own superstitious misgivings. He had obeyed the summons which called him to the rector's bedside, with the firm intention of confiding his previsions of coming trouble to Mr. Brock; and he had been doubly confirmed in his superstition, when he found that Death had entered the house before him, and had parted them, in this world, for ever. More than this, he had travelled back to be present at the funeral, with a secret sense of relief at the prospect of being parted from Armadale, and with a secret resolution to make the after-meeting agreed on between us three at Naples, a meeting that should never take place. With that purpose in his heart, he had gone up alone to the room prepared for him, on his arrival at the rectory, and had opened a letter which he found

waiting for him on the table. The letter had only that day been discovered — dropped and lost — under the bed on which Mr. Brock had died. It was in the rector's handwriting throughout; and the person to whom it was addressed, was Midwinter himself.

"Having told me this, nearly in the words in which I have written it, he gave me the written paper that lay on the table between us.

"'Read it,' he said; 'and you will not need to be told that my mind is at peace again, and that I took Allan's hand at parting, with a heart that was worthier of Allan's love.'

"I read the letter. There was no superstition to be conquered in *my* mind; there were no old feelings of gratitude towards Armadale, to be roused in *my* heart — and yet, the effect which the letter had had on Midwinter, was, I firmly believe, more than matched by the effect that the letter now produced on Me.

"It was vain to ask him to leave it, and to let me read it again (as I wished) when I was left by myself. He is determined to keep it side by side with that other paper which I had seen him take out of his pocket-book, and which contains the written narrative of Armadale's Dream. All I could do was to ask his leave to copy it; and this he granted readily. I wrote the copy in his presence; and I now place it here in my diary, to mark a day which is one of the memorable days of my life.

"Boscombe Rectory, August 2nd.

"My dear Midwinter, — For the first time since the beginning of my illness, I found strength enough

yesterday to look over my letters. One among them is a letter from Allan, which has been lying unopened on my table for ten days past. He writes to me in great distress, to say that there has been dissension between you, and that you have left him. If you still remember what passed between us, when you first opened your heart to me in the Isle of Man, you will be at no loss to understand how I have thought over this miserable news, through the night that has now passed, and you will not be surprised to hear, that I have roused myself this morning to make the effort of writing to you.

"I want no explanation of the circumstances which have parted you from your friend. If my estimate of your character is not founded on an entire delusion, the one influence which can have led to your estrangement from Allan, is the influence of that evil spirit of Superstition, which I have once already cast out of your heart — which I will once again conquer, please God, if I have strength enough to make my pen speak my mind to you in this letter.

"It is no part of my design to combat the belief which I know you to hold, that mortal creatures may be the objects of supernatural intervention in their pilgrimage through this world. Speaking as a reasonable man, I own that I cannot prove you to be wrong. Speaking as a believer in the Bible, I am bound to go farther, and to admit that you possess a higher than any human warrant for the faith that is in you. The one object which I have it at heart to attain, is to induce you to free yourself from the paralysing fatalism of the heathen and the savage, and to look at the mysteries that perplex, and

the portents that daunt you, from the Christian's point of view. If I can succeed in this, I shall clear your mind of the ghastly doubts that now oppress it, and I shall re-unite you to your friend, never to be parted from him again.

"I have no means of seeing and questioning you. I can only send this letter to Allan to be forwarded, if he knows, or can discover, your present address. Placed in this position towards you, I am bound to assume all that *can* be assumed in your favour. I will take it for granted that something has happened to you or to Allan, which to your mind has not only confirmed the fatalist conviction in which your father died, but has added a new and terrible meaning to the warning which he sent you in his death-bed letter.

"On this common ground I meet you. On this common ground I appeal to your higher nature and your better sense.

"Preserve your present conviction that the events which have happened (be they what they may) are not to be reconciled with ordinary mortal coincidences and ordinary mortal laws; and view your own position by the best and clearest light that your superstition can throw on it. What are you? You are a helpless instrument in the hands of Fate. You are doomed, beyond all human capacity of resistance, to bring misery and destruction blindfold on a man to whom you have harmlessly and gratefully united yourself in the bonds of a brother's love. All that is morally firmest in your will and morally purest in your aspirations, avails nothing against the hereditary impulsion

of you towards evil, caused by a crime which your father committed before you were born. In what does that belief end? It ends in the darkness in which you are now lost; in the self-contradictions in which you are now bewildered — in the stubborn despair by which a man profanes his own soul, and lowers himself to the level of the brutes that perish.

"Look up, my poor suffering brother — look up, my hardly-tried, my well-loved friend, higher than this! Meet the doubts that now assail you from the blessed vantage-ground of Christian courage and Christian hope; and your heart will turn again to Allan, and your mind will be at peace. Happen what may, God is all-merciful, God is all-wise: natural or supernatural, it happens through Him. The mystery of Evil that perplexes our feeble minds, the sorrow and the suffering that torture us in this little life, leave the one great truth unshaken that the destiny of man is in the hands of his Creator, and that God's blessed Son died to make us worthier of it. Nothing that is done in unquestioning submission to the wisdom of the Almighty, is done wrong. No evil exists, out of which, in obedience to His laws, Good may not come. Be true to what Christ tells you is true. Encourage in yourself, be the circumstances what they may, all that is loving, all that is grateful, all that is patient, all that is forgiving, towards your fellow-men. And humbly and trustfully leave the rest to the God who made you, and to the Saviour who loved you better than his own life.

"This is the faith in which I have lived, by the Divine help and mercy, from my youth upward. I ask you earnestly, I ask you confidently, to make it

your faith too. It is the mainspring of all the good I have ever done, of all the happiness I have ever known; it lightens my darkness, it sustains my hope; it comforts and quiets me, lying here, to live or die, I know not which. Let it sustain, comfort, and enlighten you. It will help you in your sorest need, as it has helped me in mine. It will show you another purpose in the events which brought you and Allan together than the purpose which your guilty father foresaw. Strange things, I do not deny it, have happened to you already. Stranger things still may happen before long, which I may not live to see. Remember, if that time comes, that I died firmly disbelieving in your influence over Allan being other than an influence for good. The great sacrifice of the Atonement — I say it reverently — has its mortal reflections, even in this world. If danger ever threatens Allan, you, whose father took his father's life — YOU, and no other, may be the man whom the providence of God has appointed to save him.

"Come to me, if I live. Go back to the friend who loves you, whether I live or die. — Yours affectionately to the last,

"DECIMUS BROCK."

"'YOU, and no other, may be the man whom the providence of God has appointed to save him!'

"Those are the words which have shaken me to the soul. Those are the words which make me feel as if the dead man had left his grave, and had put his hand on the place in my heart where my terrible secret lies hidden from every living creature but myself. One part of the letter has come true already.

The danger that it foresees, threatens Armadale at this moment — and threatens him from Me!

"If the favouring circumstances which have driven me thus far, drive me on to the end; and if that old man's last earthly conviction is prophetic of the truth, Armadale will escape me, do what I may. And Midwinter will be the victim who is sacrificed to save his life.

"It is horrible! it is impossible! it shall never be! At the thinking of it only, my hand trembles, and my heart sinks. I bless the trembling that unnerves me! I bless the sinking that turns me faint! I bless those words in the letter which have revived the relenting thoughts that first came to me two days since! Is it hard, now that events are taking me, smoothly and safely, nearer and nearer to the End — is it hard to conquer the temptation to go on? No! If there is only a chance of harm coming to Midwinter, the dread of that chance is enough to decide me — enough to strengthen me to conquer the temptation, for his sake. I have never loved him yet, never, never, never as I love him now!

"*Sunday, August 10th.* — The eve of my wedding-day! I close and lock this book, never to write in it, never to open it again.

"I have won the great victory; I have trampled my own wickedness under foot. I am innocent; I am happy again. My love! my angel! when to-morrow gives me to you, I will not have a thought in my heart which is not *your* thought, as well as mine!"

CHAPTER XV.

The Wedding Day.

THE time was nine o'clock in the morning. The place was a private room in one of the old-fashioned inns, which still remain on the Borough side of the Thames. The date was Monday, the 11th of August. And the person was Mr. Bashwood, who had travelled to London on a summons from his son, and had taken up his abode at the inn, on the previous day.

He had never yet looked so pitiably old and helpless as he looked now. The fever and chill of alternating hope and despair, had dried and withered and wasted him. The angles of his figure had sharpened. The outline of his face had shrunk. His dress pointed the melancholy change in him, with a merciless and shocking emphasis. Never, even in his youth, had he worn such clothes as he wore now. With the desperate resolution to leave no chance untried of producing an impression on Miss Gwilt, he had cast aside his dreary black garments; he had even mustered the courage to wear his blue satin cravat. His coat was a riding coat of light grey. He had ordered it, with a vindictive subtlety of purpose, to be made on the pattern of a coat that he had seen Allan wear. His waistcoat was white; his trousers were of the gayest summer pattern, in the largest check. His wig was oiled and scented, and brushed round, on either side, to hide the wrinkles on his temples. He was an object to laugh at — he was an object to weep over. His enemies, if a creature so wretched could have had enemies, would have forgiven him, on seeing him in his new dress. His friends

— had any of his friends been left — would have been less distressed if they had looked at him in his coffin, than if they had looked at him as he was now. Incessantly restless, he paced the room from end to end. Now he looked at his watch; now he looked out of window; now he looked at the well-furnished breakfast-table — always with the same wistful uneasy inquiry in his eyes. The waiter coming in, with the urn of boiling water, was addressed for the fiftieth time in the one form of words which the miserable creature seemed to be capable of uttering that morning, — "My son is coming to breakfast. My son is very particular. I want everything of the best — hot things, and cold things — and tea and coffee — and all the rest of it, waiter; all the rest of it." For the fiftieth time, he now reiterated those anxious words. For the fiftieth time, the impenetrable waiter had just returned his one pacifying answer, "All right, sir; you may leave it to me" — when the sound of leisurely footsteps was heard on the stairs; the door opened; and the long-expected son sauntered indolently into the room, with a neat little black-leather bag in his hand.

"Well done, old gentleman!" said Bashwood the younger, surveying his father's dress with a smile of sardonic encouragement. "You're ready to be married to Miss Gwilt at a moment's notice!"

The father took the son's hand, and tried to echo the son's laugh.

"You have such good spirits, Jemmy," he said, using the name in its familiar form, as he had been accustomed to use it, in happier days. "You always had good spirits, my dear, from a child. Come and sit down; I've ordered you a nice breakfast. Every-

thing of the best! everything of the best! What a relief it is to see you! Oh, dear, dear, what a relief it is to see you." He stopped and sat down at the table — his face flushed with the effort to control the impatience that was devouring him. "Tell me about her!" he burst out, giving up the effort with a sudden self-abandonment. "I shall die, Jemmy, if I wait for it any longer. Tell me! tell me! tell me!"

"One thing at a time," said Bashwood the younger, perfectly unmoved by his father's impatience. "We'll try the breakfast first, and come to the lady afterwards? Gently does it, old gentleman — gently does it!"

He put his leather bag on a chair, and sat down opposite to his father, composed, and smiling, and humming a little tune.

No ordinary observation, applying the ordinary rules of analysis, would have detected the character of Bashwood the younger in his face. His youthful look, aided by his light hair, and his plump beardless cheeks; his easy manner, and his ever-ready smile; his eyes which met unshrinkingly the eyes of every one whom he addressed, all combined to make the impression of him a favourable impression in the general mind. No eye for reading character, but such an eye as belongs to one person, perhaps, in ten thousand, could have penetrated the smoothly-deceptive surface of this man, and have seen him for what he really was — the vile creature whom the viler need of Society has fashioned for its own use. There he sat — the Confidential Spy of modern times, whose business is steadily enlarging, whose Private Inquiry Offices are steadily on the increase. There he sat — the necessary Detective at-

tendant on the progress of our national civilization; a man who was in this instance at least, the legitimate and intelligible product of the vocation that employed him; a man professionally ready on the merest suspicion (if the merest suspicion paid him) to get under our beds, and to look through gimlet-holes in our doors; a man who would have been useless to his employers if he could have felt a touch of human sympathy in his father's presence; and who would have deservedly forfeited his situation, if, under any circumstances whatever, he had been personally accessible to a sense of pity or a sense of shame.

"Gently does it, old gentleman," he repeated, lifting the covers from the dishes, and looking under them one after the other all round the table. "Gently does it!"

"Don't be angry with me, Jemmy," pleaded his father. "Try, if you can, to think how anxious I must be. I got your letter so long ago as yesterday morning. I have had to travel all the way from Thorpe-Ambrose, — I have had to get through the dreadful long evening, and the dreadful long night — with your letter telling me that you had found out who she is, and telling me nothing more. Suspense is very hard to bear, Jemmy, when you come to my age. What was it prevented you, my dear, from coming to me when I got here yesterday evening?"

"A little dinner at Richmond," said Bashwood the younger. "Give me some tea."

Mr. Bashwood tried to comply with the request; but the hand with which he lifted the teapot trembled so unmanageably that the tea missed the cup and streamed out on the cloth. "I'm very sorry; I can't

help trembling whem I'm anxious," said the old man, as his son took the teapot out of his hand. "I'm afraid you bear mé malice, Jemmy, for what happened when I was last in town. I own I was obstinate and unreasonable about going back to Thorpe-Ambrose. I'm more sensible now. You were quite right in taking it all on yourself, as soon as I showed you the veiled lady, when we saw her come out of the hotel; and you were quite right to send me back the same day to my business in the steward's office at the Great House." He watched the effect of these concessions on his son, and ventured doubtfully on another entreaty. "If you won't tell me anything else just yet," he said, faintly, "will you tell me how you found her out. Do, Jemmy, — do!"

Bashwood the younger looked up from his plate. "I'll tell you that," he said. "The reckoning up of Miss Gwilt has cost more money and taken more time than I expected; and the sooner we come to a settlement about it, the sooner we shall get to what you want to know."

Without a word of expostulation, the father laid his dingy old pocket-book and his purse on the table before the son. Bashwood the younger looked into the purse; observed, with a contemptuous elevation of the eyebrows, that it held no more than a sovereign and some silver; and returned it intact. The pocket-book, on being opened next, proved to contain four five-pound notes. Bashwood the younger transferred three of the notes to his own keeping; and handed the pocket-book back to his father, with a bow expressive of mock gratitude, and sarcastic respect.

"A thousand thanks," he said. "Some of it is for

the people at our office, and the balance is for myself. One of the few stupid things, my dear sir, that I have done in the course of my life, was to write you word when you first consulted me, that you might have my services gratis. As you see, I hasten to repair the error. An hour or two at odd times, I was ready enough to give you. But this business has taken days, and has got in the way of other jobs. I told you I couldn't be out of pocket by you — I put it in my letter, as plain as words could say it."

"Yes, yes, Jemmy. I don't complain, my dear, I don't complain. Never mind the money — tell me how you found her out."

"Besides," pursued Bashwood the younger, proceeding impenetrably with his justification of himself, "I have given you the benefit of my experience — I've done it cheap. It would have cost double the money, if another man had taken this in hand. Another man would have kept a watch on Mr. Armadale as well as Miss Gwilt. I have saved you that expense. You are certain that Mr. Armadale is bent on marrying her. Very good. In that case, while we have our eye on *her*, we have, for all useful purposes, got our eye on *him*. Know where the lady is, and you know that the gentleman can't be far off."

"Quite true, Jemmy. But how was it Miss Gwilt came to give you so much trouble?"

"She's a devilish clever woman," said Bashwood the younger; "that's how it was. She gave us the slip at a milliner's shop. We made it all right with the milliner, and speculated on the chance of her coming back to try on a gown she had ordered. The cleverest women lose the use of their wits in nine cases out of ten, where

there's a new dress in the case — and even Miss Gwilt was rash enough to go back. That was all we wanted. One of the women from our office helped to try on her new gown, and put her in the right position to be seen by one of our men behind the door. He instantly suspected who she was, on the strength of what he had been told of her — for she's a famous woman in her way. Of course, we didn't trust to that. We traced her to her new address; and we got a man from Scotland Yard, who was certain to know her, if our own man's idea was the right one. The man from Scotland Yard turned milliner's lad for the occasion, and took her gown home. He saw her in the passage, and identified her in an instant. You're in luck, I can tell you. Miss Gwilt's a public character. If we had had a less notorious woman to deal with, she might have cost us weeks of inquiry, and you might have had to pay hundreds of pounds. A day did it in Miss Gwilt's case; and another day put the whole story of her life, in black and white, into my hands. There it is at the present moment, old gentleman, in my black bag.

Bashwood the father made straight for the bag with eager eyes, and outstretched hand. Bashwood the son took a little key out of his waistcoat pocket — winked — shook his head — and put the key back again.

"I hav'n't done breakfast yet," he said. "Gently does it, my dear sir — gently does it."

"I can't wait!" cried the old man, struggling vainly to preserve his self-control. "It's past nine! It's a fortnight to-day since she went to London with Mr. Armadale! She may be married to him in a fortnight! She may be married to him this morning! I can't wait! I can't wait!"

"There's no knowing what you can do till you try," rejoined Bashwood the younger. "Try; and you'll find you *can* wait. What has become of your curiosity?" he went on, feeding the fire ingeniously with a stick at a time. "Why don't you ask me what I mean by calling Miss Gwilt a public character? Why don't you wonder how I came to lay my hand on the story of her life, in black and white? If you'll sit down again, I'll tell you. If you won't, I shall confine myself to my breakfast."

Mr. Bashwood sighed heavily, and went back to his chair.

"I wish you were not so fond of your joke, Jemmy," he said; "I wish, my dear, you were not quite so fond of your joke."

"Joke?" repeated his son. "It would be serious enough in some people's eyes, I can tell you. Miss Gwilt has been tried for her life; and the papers in that black bag are the lawyer's instructions for the Defence. Do you call that a joke?"

The father started to his feet, and looked straight across the table at the son with a smile of exultation that was terrible to see.

"She's been tried for her life!" he burst out, with a deep gasp of satisfaction. "She's been tried for her life!" He broke into a low prolonged laugh, and snapped his fingers exultingly. "Aha-ha-ha! Something to frighten Mr. Armadale in *that!*"

Scoundrel as he was, the son was daunted by the explosion of pent-up passion which burst on him in those words.

"Don't excite yourself," he said, with a sullen sup-

pression of the mocking manner in which he had spoken thus far.

Mr. Bashwood sat down again, and passed his handkerchief over his forehead. "No," he said, nodding and smiling at his son. "No, no — no excitement, as you say — I can wait now, Jemmy; I can wait now."

He waited with immovable patience. At intervals, he nodded, and smiled, and whispered to himself, "Something to frighten Mr. Armadale in *that!*" But he made no further attempt, by word, look, or action to hurry his son.

Bashwood the younger finished his breakfast slowly, out of pure bravado; lit a cigar, with the utmost deliberation; looked at his father, and, seeing him still as immovably patient as ever, opened the black bag at last, and spread the papers on the table.

"How will you have it?" he asked. "Long or short? I have got her whole life here. The counsel who defended her at the trial was instructed to hammer hard at the sympathies of the jury: he went head over ears into the miseries of her past career, and shocked everybody in court in the most workmanlike manner. Shall I take the same line? Do you want to know all about her, from the time when she was in short frocks and frilled trousers? or do you prefer getting on at once to her first appearance as a prisoner in the dock?"

"I want to know all about her," said his father eagerly. "The worst, and the best — the worst, particularly. Don't spare my feelings, Jemmy — whatever you do, don't spare my feelings! Can't I look at the papers myself?"

"No, you can't. They would be all Greek and

Hebrew to you. Thank your stars that you have got a sharp son, who can take the pith out of these papers, and give it a smack of the right flavour in serving it up. There are not ten men in England who could tell you this woman's story as I can tell it. It's a gift, old gentleman, of the sort that is given to very few people — and it lodges here."

He tapped his forehead smartly, and turned to the first page of the manuscript before him, with an unconcealed triumph at the prospect of exhibiting his own cleverness, which was the first expression of a genuine feeling of any sort that had escaped him yet.

"Miss Gwilt's story begins," said Bashwood the younger, "in the market-place at Thorpe-Ambrose. One day, something like a quarter of a century ago, a travelling quack-doctor, who dealt in perfumery as well as medicines, came to the town, with his cart, and exhibited, as a living example of the excellence of his washes and hair-oils and so on, a pretty little girl, with a beautiful complexion and wonderful hair. His name was Oldershaw. He had a wife, who helped him in the perfumery part of his business, and who carried it on by herself after his death. She has risen in the world of late years; and she is identical with that sly old lady who employed me professionally a short time since. As for the pretty little girl, you know who she was as well as I do. While the quack was haranguing the mob, and showing them the child's hair, a young lady, driving through the market-place, stopped her carriage to hear what it was all about; saw the little girl; and took a violent fancy to her on the spot. The young lady was the daughter of Mr. Blanchard, of

Thorpe-Ambrose. She went home, and interested her father in the fate of the innocent little victim of the quack-doctor. The same evening, the Oldershaws were sent for to the great house, and were questioned. They declared themselves to be her uncle and aunt — a lie, of course! — and they were quite willing to let her attend the village school, while they stayed at Thorpe-Ambrose, when the proposal was made to them. The new arrangement was carried out the next day. And the day after that, the Oldershaws had disappeared, and had left the little girl on the squire's hands! She evidently hadn't answered as they expected in the capacity of an advertisement — and that was the way they took of providing for her for life. There is the first act of the play for you! Clear enough, so far, isn't it?"

"Clear enough, Jemmy, to clever people. But I'm old and slow. I don't understand one thing. Whose child was she?"

"A very sensible question. Sorry to inform you that nobody can answer it — Miss Gwilt herself included. These instructions that I'm referring to are founded, of course, on her own statements, sifted by her attorney. All she could remember, on being questioned, was, that she was beaten and half starved, somewhere in the country, by a woman who took in children at nurse. The woman had a card with her, stating that her name was Lydia Gwilt, and got a yearly allowance for taking care of her (paid through a lawyer), till she was eight years old. At that time, the allowance stopped; the lawyer had no explanation to offer; nobody came to look after her; nobody wrote. The Oldershaws saw her, and thought she might answer

to exhibit; and the woman parted with her for a trifle to the Oldershaws; and the Oldershaws parted with her for good and all to the Blanchards. That's the story of her birth, parentage, and education! She may be the daughter of a Duke, or the daughter of a costermonger. The circumstances may be highly romantic, or utterly commonplace. Fancy anything you like — there's nothing to stop you. When you've had your fancy out, say the word, and I'll turn over the leaves and go on."

"Please to go on, Jemmy — please to go on."

"The next glimpse of Miss Gwilt," resumed Bashwood the younger, turning over the papers, "is a glimpse at a family mystery. The deserted child was in luck's way at last. She had taken the fancy of an amiable young lady with a rich father, and she was petted and made much of at the great house, in the character of Miss Blanchard's last new plaything. Not long afterwards Mr. Blanchard and his daughter went abroad, and took the girl with them in the capacity of Miss Blanchard's little maid. When they came back, the daughter had married, and become a widow, in the interval; and the pretty little maid, instead of returning with them to Thorpe-Ambrose, turns up suddenly, all alone, as a pupil at a school in France. There she was, at a first-rate establishment, with her maintenance and education secured until she married and settled in life, on this understanding, — that she never returned to England. Those were all the particulars she could be prevailed on to give the lawyer who drew up these instructions. She declined to say what had happened abroad; she declined even, after all the years that had passed, to mention her mistress's married name. It's

quite clear, of course, that she was in possession of some family secret; and that the Blanchards paid for her schooling on the Continent to keep her out of the way. And it's equally plain that she would never have kept her secret as she did, if she had not seen her way to trading on it for her own advantage at some future time. A clever woman, as I've told you already! A devilish clever woman, who hasn't been knocked about in the world, and seen the ups and downs of life abroad and at home for nothing."

"Yes, yes, Jemmy; quite true. How long did she stop, please, at the school in France?"

Bashwood the younger referred to the papers.

"She stopped at the French school, he replied, "till she was seventeen. At that time, something happened at the school which I find mildly described in these papers as 'something unpleasant.' The plain fact was, that the music-master attached to the establishment fell in love with Miss Gwilt. He was a respectable middle-aged man, with a wife and family — and finding the circumstances entirely hopeless, he took a pistol, and rashly assuming that he had brains in his head, tried to blow them out. The doctors saved his life, but not his reason — he ended, where he had better have begun, in an asylum. Miss Gwilt's beauty having been at the bottom of the scandal, it was of course impossible — though she was proved to have been otherwise quite blameless in the matter — for her to remain at the school after what had happened. Her 'friends' (the Blanchards) were communicated with. And her friends transferred her to another school; at Brussels, this time. — What are you sighing about? what's wrong now?"

"I can't help feeling a little for the poor music-master, Jemmy. Go on."

"According to her own account of it, dad, Miss Gwilt seems to have felt for him too. She took a serious turn; and was 'converted' (as they call it) by the lady who had charge of her in the interval before she went to Brussels. The priest at the Belgian school appears to have been a man of some discretion, and to have seen that the girl's sensibilities were getting into a dangerously excited state. Before he could quiet her down, he fell ill, and was succeeded by another priest, who was a fanatic. You will understand the sort of interest he took in the girl, and the way in which he worked on her feelings, when I tell you that she announced it as her decision, after having been nearly two years at the school, to end her days in a convent! You may well stare! Miss Gwilt, in the character of a Nun, is the sort of female phenomenon you don't often set eyes on."

"Did she go into the convent?" asked Mr. Bashwood. "Did they let her go in, so friendless and so young, with nobody to advise her for the best?"

"The Blanchards were consulted, as a matter of form," pursued Bashwood the younger. "*They* had no objection to her shutting herself up in a convent, as you may well imagine. The pleasantest letter they ever had from her, I'll answer for it, was the letter in which she solemnly took leave of them in this world for ever. The people at the convent were as careful as usual not to commit themselves. Their rules wouldn't allow her to take the veil till she had tried the life for a year first, and then, if she had any doubt, for another year after that. She tried the life for the first

year, accordingly — and doubted. She tried it for the second year — and was wise enough, by that time, to give it up without further hesitation. Her position was rather an awkward one when she found herself at liberty again. The sisters at the convent had lost their interest in her; the mistress at the school declined to take her back as teacher, on the ground that she was too nice-looking for the place; the priest considered her to be possessed by the devil. There was nothing for it but to write to the Blanchards again, and ask them to start her in life as a teacher of music on her own account. She wrote to her former mistress accordingly. Her former mistress had evidently doubted the genuineness of the girl's resolution to be a nun, and had seized the opportunity offered by her entry into the convent to cut off all further communication between her ex-waiting maid and herself. Miss Gwilt's letter was returned by the post-office. She caused inquiries to be made; and found that Mr. Blanchard was dead, and that his daughter had left the great house for some place of retirement unknown. The next thing she did, upon this, was to write to the heir in possession of the estate. The letter was answered by his solicitors, who were instructed to put the law in force at the first attempt she made to extort money from any member of the family at Thorpe-Ambrose. The last chance was to get at the address of her mistress's place of retirement. The family bankers, to whom she wrote, wrote back to say that they were instructed not to give the lady's address to any one applying for it, without being previously empowered to do so by the lady herself. That last letter settled the question — Miss Gwilt could do nothing more. With money at her command,

she might have gone to England, and made the Blanchards think twice before they carried things with too high a hand. Not having a halfpenny at command, she was helpless. Without money and without friends, you may wonder how she supported herself while the correspondence was going on. She supported herself by playing the pianoforte at a low concert-room in Brussels. The men laid siege to her, of course, in all directions — but they found her insensible as adamant. One of these rejected gentlemen was a Russian; and he was the means of making her acquainted with a countrywoman of his — whose name is unpronounceable by English lips. Let us give her her title, and call her the Baroness. The two women liked each other at their first introduction; and a new scene opened in Miss Gwilt's life. She became reader and companion to the Baroness. Everything was right, everything was smooth on the surface. Everything was rotten and everything was wrong, under it."

"In what way, Jemmy? Please to wait a little, and tell me in what way."

"In this way. The Baroness was fond of travelling, and she had a select set of friends about her, who were quite of her way of thinking. They went from one city on the Continent to another, and were such charming people that they picked up acquaintances everywhere. The acquaintances were invited to the Baroness's receptions — and card-tables were invariably a part of the Baroness's furniture. Do you see it now? or must I tell you, in the strictest confidence, that cards were not considered sinful on these festive occasions, and that the luck, at the end of the evening, turned out to be almost invariably on the side of the

Baroness and her friends. Swindlers, all of them — and there isn't a doubt on my mind, whatever there may be on yours, that Miss Gwilt's manners and appearance made her a valuable member of the society in the capacity of a decoy. Her own statement is, that she was innocent of all knowledge of what really went on; that she was quite ignorant of card-playing; that she hadn't such a thing as a respectable friend to turn to in the world; and that she honestly liked the Baroness, for the simple reason that the Baroness was a hearty good friend to her from first to last. Believe that or not, as you please. For five years she travelled about all over the Continent, with these card-sharpers in high life, and she might have been among them at this moment, for anything I know to the contrary, if the Baroness had not caught a Tartar at Naples, in the shape of a rich travelling Englishman, named Waldron. Aha! that name startles you, does it? You've read the Trial of the famous Mrs. Waldron, like the rest of the world? And you know who Miss Gwilt is now, without my telling you?"

He paused, and looked at his father in sudden perplexity. Far from being overwhelmed by the discovery which had just burst on him, Mr. Bashwood, after the first natural movement of surprise, faced his son with a self-possession which was nothing short of extraordinary under the circumstances. There was a new brightness in his eyes, and a new colour in his face. If it had been possible to conceive such a thing of a man in his position, he seemed to be absolutely encouraged instead of depressed by what he had just heard. "Go on, Jemmy," he said, quietly; "I am one of the few people who didn't read the Trial — I only heard of it."

Still wondering inwardly, Bashwood the younger recovered himself, and went on.

"You always were, and you always will be, behind the age," he said. "When we come to the Trial, I can tell you as much about it as you need know. In the meantime, we must go back to the Baroness and Mr. Waldron. For a certain number of nights the Englishman let the card-sharpers have it all their own way — in other words, he paid for the privilege of making himself agreeable to Miss Gwilt. When he thought he had produced the necessary impression on her, he exposed the whole confederacy without mercy. The police interfered; the Baroness found herself in prison; and Miss Gwilt was put between the two alternatives of accepting Mr. Waldron's protection, or being thrown on the world again. She was amazingly virtuous, or amazingly clever, which you please. To Mr. Waldron's astonishment, she told him that she could face the prospect of being thrown on the world; and that he must address her honourably or leave her for ever. The end of it was what the end always is, where the man is infatuated and the woman is determined. To the disgust of his family and friends, Mr. Waldron made a virtue of necessity, and married her."

"How old was he?" asked Bashwood the elder eagerly.

Bashwood the younger burst out laughing. "He was about old enough, daddy, to be your son, and rich enough to have burst that precious pocket-book of yours with thousand-pound notes! Don't hang your head. It wasn't a happy marriage, though he *was* so young and so rich. They lived abroad, and got on well enough at first. He made a new will, of course,

as soon as he was married, and provided handsomely for his wife, under the tender pressure of the honeymoon. But women wear out, like other things, with time; and one fine morning Mr. Waldron woke up with a doubt in his mind whether he had not acted like a fool. He was an ill-tempered man; he was discontented with himself; and of course he made his wife feel it. Having begun by quarrelling with her, he got on to suspecting her, and became savagely jealous of every male creature who entered the house. They had no incumbrances in the shape of children, and they moved from one place to another, just as his jealousy inclined him, till they moved back to England at last, after having been married close on four years. He had a lonely old house of his own among the Yorkshire moors, and there he shut his wife and himself up from every living creature; except his servants and his dogs. Only one result could come, of course, of treating a high-spirited young woman in that way. It may be her fate, or it may be chance — but, whenever a woman is desperate, there is sure to be a man handy to take advantage of it. The man in this case was rather a 'dark horse,' as they say on the turf. He was a certain Captain Manuel, a native of Cuba, and (according to his own account) an ex-officer in the Spanish navy. He had met Mr. Waldron's beautiful wife on the journey back to England; had contrived to speak to her in spite of her husband's jealousy; and had followed her to her place of imprisonment in Mr. Waldron's house on the moors. The captain is described as a clever, determined fellow — of the daring piratical sort — with the dash of mystery about him that women like ——"

"She's not the same as other women!" interposed

Mr. Bashwood, suddenly interrupting his son. "Did she —?" His voice failed him, and he stopped without bringing the question to an end.

"Did she like the captain?" suggested Bashwood the younger with another laugh. "According to her own account of it, she adored him. At the same time her conduct (as represented by herself) was perfectly innocent. Considering how carefully her husband watched her, the statement (incredible as it appears) is probably true. For six weeks or so, they confined themselves to corresponding privately; the Cuban captain (who spoke and wrote English perfectly,) having contrived to make a go-between of one of the female servants in the Yorkshire house. How it might have ended we needn't trouble ourselves to inquire — Mr. Waldron himself brought matters to a crisis. Whether he got wind of the clandestine correspondence or not, doesn't appear. But this is certain, that he came home from a ride one day, in a fiercer temper than usual — that his wife showed him a sample of that high spirit of hers which he had never yet been able to break — and that it ended in his striking her across the face with his riding-whip. Ungentlemanly conduct, I am afraid we must admit; but to all outward appearance, the riding-whip produced the most astonishing results. From that moment, the lady submitted as she had never submitted before. For a fortnight afterwards, he did what he liked; and she never thwarted him — he said what he liked; and she never uttered a word of protest. Some men might have suspected this sudden reformation of hiding something dangerous under the surface. Whether Mr. Waldron looked at it in that light, I can't tell you. All that is known is, that before the mark of the whip

was off his wife's face, he fell ill, and that in two days afterwards, he was a dead man. What do you say to that?"

"I say he deserved it!" answered Mr. Bashwood, striking his hand excitedly on the table, as his son paused, and looked at him.

"The doctor who attended the dying man was not of your way of thinking," remarked Bashwood the younger, drily. "He called in two other medical men, and they all three refused to certify the death. The usual legal investigation followed. The evidence of the doctors and the evidence of the servants pointed irresistibly in one and the same direction; and Mrs. Waldron was committed for trial, on the charge of murdering her husband by poison. A solicitor in first-rate criminal practice was sent for from London, to get up the prisoner's defence — and these 'Instructions' took their form and shape accordingly. What's the matter? What do you want now?"

Suddenly rising from his chair, Mr. Bashwood stretched across the table, and tried to take the papers from his son. "I want to look at them," he burst out eagerly. "I want to see what they say about the captain from Cuba. He was at the bottom of it, Jemmy — I'll swear he was at the bottom of it!"

"Nobody doubted that, who was in the secret of the case at the time," rejoined his son. "But nobody could prove it. Sit down again, dad, and compose yourself. There's nothing here about Captain Manuel but the lawyer's private suspicions of him, for the counsel to act on or not, at the counsel's discretion. From first to last, she persisted in screening the captain. At the outset of the business, she volunteered two statements to the lawyer — both of which he suspected to be false. In the first place, she declared that

she was innocent of the crime. He wasn't surprised, of course, so far; his clients were, as a general rule, in the habit of deceiving him in that way. In the second place, while admitting her private correspondence with the Cuban captain, she declared that the letters on both sides related solely to a proposed elopement, to which her husband's barbarous treatment had induced her to consent. The lawyer naturally asked to see the letters. 'He has burnt all my letters, and I have burnt all his,' was the only answer he got. It was quite possible that Captain Manuel might have burnt *her* letters, when he heard there was a coroner's inquest in the house. But it was in her solicitor's experience (as it is in my experience too) that when a woman is fond of a man, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, risk or no risk, she keeps his letters. Having his suspicions roused in this way, the lawyer privately made some inquiries about the foreign captain — and found that he was as short of money as a foreign captain could be. At the same time, he put some questions to his client about her expectations from her deceased husband. She answered, in high indignation, that a will had been found among her husband's papers, privately executed only a few days before his death, and leaving her no more, out of all his immense fortune, than five thousand pounds. 'Was there an older will, then,' says the lawyer, 'which the new will revoked?' Yes, there was; a will that he had given into her own possession; a will made when they were first married. 'Leaving his widow well provided for?' Leaving her just ten times as much as the second will left her. 'Had she ever mentioned that first will, now revoked, to Captain Manuel?' She saw the trap set.

for her — and said, 'No, never!' without an instant's hesitation. That reply confirmed the lawyer's suspicions. He tried to frighten her by declaring that her life might pay the forfeit of her deceiving him in this matter. With the usual obstinacy of women, she remained just as immovable as ever. The captain, on his side, behaved in the most exemplary manner. He confessed to planning the elopement; he declared that he had burnt all the lady's letters as they reached him, out of regard for her reputation; he remained in the neighbourhood; and he volunteered to attend before the magistrates. Nothing was discovered that could legally connect him with the crime — or that could put him into court on the day of the Trial, in any other capacity than the capacity of a witness. I don't believe myself that there's any moral doubt (as they call it) that Manuel knew of the will which left her mistress of fifty thousand pounds; and that he was ready and willing, in virtue of that circumstance, to marry her on Mr. Waldron's death. If anybody tempted her to effect her own release from her husband by making herself a widow, the captain must have been the man. And unless she contrived, guarded and watched as she was, to get the poison for herself, the poison must have come to her in one of the captain's letters."

"I don't believe she used it, if it did come to her!" exclaimed Mr. Bashwood. "I believe it was the captain himself who poisoned her husband!"

Bashwood the younger, without noticing the interruption, folded up the Instructions for the Defence, which had now served their purpose; put them back in his bag; and produced a printed pamphlet in their place.

"Here is one of the published Reports of the Trial," he said, "which you can read at your leisure, if you like. We needn't waste time now by going into details. I have told you already how cleverly her counsel paved his way for treating the charge of murder, as the crowning calamity of the many that had already fallen on an innocent woman. The two legal points relied on for the defence (after this preliminary flourish) were: — First, that there was no evidence to connect her with the possession of poison; and, secondly, that the medical witnesses, while positively declaring that her husband had died by poison, differed in their conclusions as to the particular drug that had killed him. Both good points, and both well worked; but the evidence on the other side bore down everything before it. The prisoner was proved to have had no less than three excellent reasons for killing her husband. He had treated her with almost unexampled barbarity; he had left her in a will (unrevoked so far as she knew) mistress of a fortune on his death; and she was by her own confession contemplating an elopement with another man. Having set forth these motives, the prosecution next showed by evidence, which was never once shaken on any single point, that the one person in the house who could by any human possibility have administered the poison, was the prisoner at the bar. What could the judge and jury do, with such evidence before them as this? The verdict was Guilty, as a matter of course; and the judge declared that he agreed with it. The female part of the audience was in hysterics; and the male part was not much better. The judge sobbed, and the bar shuddered. She was sentenced to death in such a scene as had never been

previously witnessed in an English Court of Justice. And she is alive and hearty at the present moment; free to do any mischief she pleases, and to poison at her own entire convenience, any man, woman, or child that happens to stand in her way. A most interesting woman! Keep on good terms with her, my dear sir, whatever you do — for the Law has said to her in the plainest possible English, 'My charming friend, I have no terrors for *you!*'"

"How was she pardoned?" asked Mr. Bashwood breathlessly. "They told me at the time — but I have forgotten. Was it the Home-Secretary? If it was, I respect the Home-Secretary! I say the Home-Secretary was deserving of his place."

"Quite right, old gentleman!" rejoined Bashwood the younger. "The Home-Secretary was the obedient humble servant of an enlightened Free Press — and he *was* deserving of his place. Is it possible you don't know how she cheated the gallows? If you don't I must tell you. On the evening of the Trial, two or three of the young Buccaniers of Literature went down to two or three newspaper offices, and wrote two or three heartrending leading articles on the subject of the proceedings in court. The next morning the public caught light like tinder; and the prisoner was tried over again, before an amateur court of justice, in the columns of the newspapers. All the people who had no personal experience whatever on the subject, seized their pens, and rushed (by kind permission of the editor) into print. Doctors who had *not* attended the sick man, and who had *not* been present at the examination of the body, declared by dozens that he had *died* a natural death. Barristers without business, who

had *not* heard the evidence, attacked the jury who had heard it, and judged the Judge, who had sat on the bench before some of them were born. The general public followed the lead of the barristers and the doctors, and the young Buccaniers who had set the thing going. Here was the Law that they all paid to protect them, actually doing its duty in dreadful earnest! Shocking! shocking! The British Public rose to protest as one man against the working of its own machinery; and the Home-Secretary, in a state of distraction, went to the Judge. The Judge held firm. He had said it was the right verdict at the time, and he said so still. 'But suppose,' says the Home-Secretary, 'that the prosecution had tried some other way of proving her guilty at the trial than the way they did try — what would you and the jury have done then?' Of course it was quite impossible for the Judge to say. This comforted the Home-Secretary, to begin with. And, when he got the Judge's consent, after that, to having the conflict of medical evidence submitted to one great doctor; and when the one great doctor took the merciful view, after expressly stating, in the first instance, that he knew nothing practically of the merits of the case, the Home-Secretary was perfectly satisfied. The prisoner's death-warrant went into the waste-paper basket; the verdict of the Law was reversed by general acclamation; and the verdict of the newspapers carried the day. But the best of it is to come. You know what happened when the people found themselves with the pet object of their sympathy suddenly cast loose on their hands? A general impression prevailed directly that she was not quite innocent enough, after all, to be let out of prison then and there! Punish her a little —

that was the state of the popular feeling — punish her a little, Mr. Home-Secretary, on general moral grounds. A small course of gentle legal medicine, if you love us, and then we shall feel perfectly easy on the subject to the end of our days."

"Don't joke about it!" cried his father. "Don't, don't, don't, Jemmy! Did they try her again? They couldn't! they durs'n't! Nobody can be tried twice over for the same offence."

"Pooh! pooh! she could be tried a second time for a second offence," retorted Bashwood the younger — "and tried she was. Luckily for the pacification of the public mind, she had rushed headlong into redressing her own grievances (as women will), when she discovered that her husband had cut her down from a legacy of fifty thousand pounds to a legacy of five thousand, by a stroke of his pen. The day before the Inquest a locked drawer in Mr. Waldron's dressing-room table, which contained some valuable jewellery, was discovered to have been opened and emptied — and when the prisoner was committed by the magistrates, the precious stones were found torn out of their settings, and sewn up in her stays. The lady considered it a case of justifiable self-compensation. The Law declared it to be a robbery committed on the executors of the dead man. The lighter offence — which had been passed over, when such a charge as murder was brought against her — was just the thing to revive, to save appearances in the eyes of the public. They had stopped the course of justice, in the case of the prisoner, at one trial; and now all they wanted was to set the course of justice going again, in the case of the prisoner, at another! She was arraigned for the

robbery, after having been pardoned for the murder. And, what is more, if her beauty and her misfortunes hadn't made a strong impression on her lawyer, she would not only have had to stand another trial, but would have had even the five thousand pounds, to which she was entitled by the second will, taken away from her, as a felon, by the Crown."

"I respect her lawyer! I admire her lawyer!" exclaimed Mr. Bashwood. "I should like to take his hand, and tell him so."

"He wouldn't thank you, if you did," remarked Bashwood the younger. "He is under a comfortable impression that nobody knows how he saved Mrs. Waldron's legacy for her but himself."

"I beg your pardon, Jemmy," interposed his father. "But don't call her Mrs. Waldron. Speak of her, please, by her name when she was innocent and young, and a girl at school. Would you mind, for my sake, calling her Miss Gwilt?"

"Not I! It makes no difference to me what name I give her. Bother your sentiment! let's go on with the facts. This is what the lawyer did before the second trial came off. He told her she would be found guilty *again*, to a dead certainty. 'And this time,' he said, 'the public will let the law take its course. Have you got an old friend whom you can trust?' She hadn't such a thing as an old friend in the world. 'Very well, then,' says the lawyer, 'you must trust me. Sign this paper; and you will have executed a fictitious sale of all your property to myself. When the right time comes, I shall first carefully settle with your husband's executors; and I shall then re-convey the money to you, securing it properly (in case you ever marry

again) in your own possession. The Crown, in other transactions of this kind, frequently waives its right of disputing the validity of the sale — and if the Crown is no harder on you than on other people, when you come out of prison you will have your five thousand pounds to begin the world with again.' — Neat of the lawyer, when she was going to be tried for robbing the executors, to put her up to a way of robbing the Crown, wasn't it? Ha! ha! what a world it is!"

The last effort of the son's sarcasm passed unheeded by the father. "In prison!" he said to himself. "Oh me, after all that misery, in prison again!"

"Yes," said Bashwood the younger, rising and stretching himself, "that's how it ended. The verdict was Guilty; and the sentence was imprisonment for two years. She served her time; and came out, as well as I can reckon it, about three years since. If you want to know what she did when she recovered her liberty, and how she went on afterwards, I may be able to tell you something about it — say, on another occasion, when you have got an extra note or two in your pocket-book. For the present, all you need know, you do know. There isn't the shadow of a doubt that this fascinating lady has the double slur on her, of having been found guilty of murder, and of having served her term of imprisonment for theft. There's your moneysworth for your money — with the whole of my wonderful knack at stating a case clearly, thrown in for nothing. If you have any gratitude in you, you ought to do something handsome, one of these days, for your son. But for me, I'll tell you what you would have done, old gentleman. If you could have had your own way, you would have married Miss Gwilt."

Mr. Bashwood rose to his feet; and looked his son steadily in the face.

"If I could have my own way," he said, "I would marry her now."

Bashwood the younger started back a step. "After all I have told you?" he asked, in the blankest astonishment.

"After all you have told me."

"With the chance of being poisoned, the first time you happened to offend her?"

"With the chance of being poisoned," answered Mr. Bashwood, "in four-and-twenty hours."

The Spy of the Private Inquiry Office dropped back into his chair, cowed by his father's words and his father's looks.

"Mad!" he said to himself. "Stark mad, by jingo!"

Mr. Bashwood looked at his watch, and hurriedly took his hat from a side-table.

"I should like to hear the rest of it," he said. "I should like to hear every word you have to tell me about her, to the very last. But the time, the dreadful, galloping time, is getting on. For all I know, they may be on their way to be married at this very moment."

"What are you going to do?" asked Bashwood the younger, getting between his father and the door.

"I am going to the hotel," said the old man, trying to pass him. "I am going to see Armadale."

"What for?"

"To tell him everything you have told me." He paused after making that reply. The terrible smile of triumph which had once already appeared on his face,

overspread it again. "Mr. Armadale is young; Mr. Armadale has all his life before him," he whispered cunningly, with his trembling fingers clutching his son's arm. "What doesn't frighten *me* will frighten *him!*"

"Wait a minute," said Bashwood the younger. "Are you as certain as ever that Mr. Armadale is the man?"

"What man?"

"The man who is going to marry her."

"Yes! yes! yes! Let me go, Jemmy — let me go."

The Spy set his back against the door, and considered for a moment. Mr. Armadale was rich. Mr. Armadale (if *he* was not stark mad, too) might be made to put the right money-value on information that saved him from the disgrace of marrying Miss Gwilt. "It may be a hundred pounds in my pocket, if I work it myself," thought Bashwood the younger. "And it won't be a halfpenny if I leave it to my father." He took up his hat and his leather bag. "Can you carry it all in your own addled old head, daddy?" he asked, with his easiest impudence of manner. "Not you! I'll go with you and help you. What do you think of that?"

The father threw his arms in an ecstacy round the son's neck. "I can't help it, Jemmy," he said, in broken tones. "You are so good to me. Take the other note, my dear — I'll manage without it — take the other note."

The son threw open the door with a flourish; and magnanimously turned his back on the father's offered pocket-book. "Hang it, old gentleman, I'm not quite so mercenary as *that!*" he said, with an appearance of

the deepest feeling. "Put up your pocket-book, and let's be off. — If I took my respected parent's last five-pound note," he thought to himself, as he led the way downstairs, "how do I know he mightn't cry halves when he sees the colour of Mr. Armadale's money? — Come along, dad!" he resumed. "We'll take a cab and catch the happy bridegroom before he starts for the church!"

They hailed a cab in the street, and started for the hotel which had been the residence of Midwinter and Allan during their stay in London. The instant the door of the vehicle had closed, Mr. Bashwood returned to the subject of Miss Gwilt.

"Tell me the rest," he said, taking his son's hand, and patting it tenderly. "Let's go on talking about her all the way to the hotel. Help me through the time, Jemmy — help me through the time."

Bashwood the younger was in high spirits at the prospect of seeing the colour of Mr. Armadale's money. He trifled with his father's anxiety to the very last.

"Let's see if you remember what I've told you already," he began. "There's a character in the story that's dropped out of it without being accounted for. Come! can you tell me who it is?"

He had reckoned on finding his father unable to answer the question. But Mr. Bashwood's memory, for anything that related to Miss Gwilt, was as clear and ready as his son's. "The foreign scoundrel who tempted her, and let her screen him at the risk of her own life," he said, without an instant's hesitation. "Don't speak of him, Jemmy, don't speak of him again!"

"I *must* speak of him," retorted the other. "You want to know what became of Miss Gwilt, when she

got out of prison, don't you? Very good — I'm in a position to tell you. She became Mrs. Manuel. It's no use staring at me, old gentleman. I know it officially. At the latter part of last year, a foreign lady came to our place, with evidence to prove that she had been lawfully married to Captain Manuel, at a former period of his career, when he had visited England for the first time. She had only lately discovered that he had been in this country again; and she had reason to believe that he had married another woman in Scotland. Our people were employed to make the necessary inquiries. Comparison of dates showed that the Scotch marriage — if it was a marriage at all, and not a sham — had taken place just about the time when Miss Gwilt was a free woman again. And a little further investigation showed us that the second Mrs. Manuel was no other than the heroine of the famous criminal trial — whom we didn't know then, but whom we do know now, to be identical with your fascinating friend, Miss Gwilt."

Mr. Bashwood's head sank on his breast. He clasped his trembling hands fast in each other, and waited in silence to hear the rest.

"Cheer up!" pursued his son. "She was no more the captain's wife than you are — and what is more, the captain himself is out of your way now. One foggy day in December last, he gave us the slip, and was off to the Continent, nobody knew where. He had spent the whole of the second Mrs. Manuel's five thousand pounds, in the time that had elapsed (between two and three years) since she had come out of prison — and the wonder was, where he had got the money to pay his travelling expenses. It turned out that he had got

it from the second Mrs. Manuel herself. She had filled his empty pockets; and there she was, waiting confidently in a miserable London lodging, to hear from him and join him as soon as he was safely settled in foreign parts! Where had *she* got the money, you may ask naturally enough? Nobody could tell at the time. My own notion is, now, that her former mistress must have been still living, and that she must have turned her knowledge of the Blanchards' family secret to profitable account at last. This is mere guess-work of course; but there's a circumstance that makes it likely guess-work, to my mind. She had an elderly female friend to apply to at the time, who was just the woman to help her in ferreting out her mistress's address. Can you guess the name of the elderly female friend? Not you! Mrs. Oldershaw of course!"

Mr. Bashwood suddenly looked up. "Why should she go back," he asked, "to the woman who had deserted her when she was a child?"

"I can't say," rejoined his son, "unless she went back in the interest of her own magnificent head of hair. The prison-scissors, I needn't tell you, had made short work of it with Miss Gwilt's love-locks, in every sense of the word — and Mrs. Oldershaw, I beg to add, is the most eminent woman in England, as Restorer-General of the dilapidated heads and faces of the female sex. Put two and two together; and perhaps you'll agree with me, in this case, that they make four."

"Yes, yes; two and two make four," repeated his father, impatiently. "But I want to know something else. Did she hear from him again? Did he send for her after he had gone away to foreign parts?"

"The captain? Why, what on earth can you be thinking of? Hadn't he spent every farthing of her money? and wasn't he loose on the Continent out of her reach? She waited to hear from him, I daresay, for she persisted in believing in him. But I'll lay you any wager you like, she never saw the sight of *his* handwriting again. We did our best at the office to open her eyes — we told her plainly that he had a first wife living, and that she hadn't the shadow of a claim on him. She wouldn't believe us, though we met her with the evidence. Obstinate, devilish obstinate. I daresay she waited for months together before she gave up the last hope of ever seeing him again."

Mr. Bashwood looked aside quickly out of the cab window. "Where could she turn for refuge next?" he said, not to his son, but to himself. "What, in heaven's name, could she do?"

"Judging by my experience of women," remarked Bashwood the younger, overhearing him, "I should say she probably tried to drown herself. But that's only guess-work again — it's all guess-work at this part of her story. You catch me at the end of my evidence, dad, when you come to Miss Gwilt's proceedings in the spring and summer of the present year. She might, or she might not, have been desperate enough to attempt suicide; and she might, or she might not, have been at the bottom of those inquiries that I made for Mrs. Oldershaw. I daresay you'll see her this morning, and perhaps, if you use your influence, you may be able to make her finish her own story herself."

Mr. Bashwood, still looking out of the cab window, suddenly laid his hand on his son's arm.

"Hush! hush!" he exclaimed, in violent agitation.

"We have got there at last. Oh, Jemmy, feel how my heart beats! Here is the hotel."

"Bother your heart," said Bashwood the younger. "Wait here while I make the inquiries."

"I'll come with you!" cried his father. "I can't wait! I tell you, I can't wait!"

They went into the hotel together, and asked for "Mr. Armadale."

The answer, after some little hesitation and delay, was that Mr. Armadale had gone away six days since. A second waiter added, that Mr. Armadale's friend — Mr. Midwinter — had only left that morning. Where had Mr. Armadale gone? Somewhere into the country. Where had Mr. Midwinter gone? Nobody knew.

Mr. Bashwood looked at his son in speechless and helpless dismay.

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Bashwood the younger, pushing his father back roughly into the cab. "He's safe enough. We shall find him at Miss Gwilt's."

The old man took his son's hand and kissed it. "Thank you, my dear," he said gratefully. "Thank you for comforting me."

The cab was driven next to the second lodging which Miss Gwilt had occupied, in the neighbourhood of Tottenham Court Road.

"Stop here," said the Spy, getting out, and shutting his father into the cab. "I mean to manage this part of the business myself."

He knocked at the house door. "I have got a note for Miss Gwilt," he said, walking into the passage, the moment the door was opened.

"She's gone," answered the servant. "She went away last night."

Bashwood the younger wasted no more words with the servant. He insisted on seeing the mistress. The mistress confirmed the announcement of Miss Gwilt's departure on the previous evening. Where had she gone to? The woman couldn't say. How had she left? On foot. At what hour? Between nine and ten. What had she done with her luggage? She had no luggage. Had a gentleman been to see her on the previous day? Not a soul, gentle or simple, had come to the house to see Miss Gwilt.

The father's face, pale and wild, was looking out of the cab window, as the son descended the house-steps. "Isn't she there, Jemmy?" he asked faintly — "Isn't she there?"

"Hold your tongue," cried the Spy, with the native coarseness of his nature rising to the surface at last. "I'm not at the end of my inquiries yet."

He crossed the road, and entered a coffee-shop situated exactly opposite the house he had just left.

In the box nearest the window two men were sitting talking together anxiously.

"Which of you was on duty yesterday evening, between nine and ten o'clock?" asked Bashwood the younger, suddenly joining them, and putting his question in a quick peremptory whisper.

"I was, sir," said one of the men, unwillingly.

"Did you lose sight of the house? — Yes! I see you did."

"Only for a minute, sir. An infernal blackguard of a soldier came in ——"

"That will do," said Bashwood the younger. "I know what the soldier did, and who sent him to do it. She has given us the slip again. You are the greatest

Ass living. Consider yourself dismissed." With those words, and with an oath to emphasize them, he left the coffee-shop and returned to the cab.

"She's gone!" cried his father. "Oh, Jemmy, Jemmy, I see it in your face!" He fell back into his own corner of the cab, with a faint wailing cry. "They're married," he moaned to himself; his hands falling helplessly on his knees; his hat falling unregarded from his head. "Stop them!" he exclaimed, suddenly rousing himself, and seizing his son in a frenzy by the collar of the coat.

"Go back to the hotel," shouted Bashwood the younger, to the cabman. "Hold your noise!" he added, turning fiercely on his father. "I want to think."

The varnish of smoothness was all off him by this time. His temper was roused. His pride — even such a man has his pride! — was wounded to the quick. Twice had he matched his wits against a woman's; and twice the woman had baffled him.

He got out, on reaching the hotel for the second time; and privately tried the servants with the offer of money. The result of the experiment satisfied him that they had, in this instance, really and truly, no information to sell. After a moment's reflection, he stopped, before leaving the hotel, to ask the way to the parish church. "The chance may be worth trying," he thought to himself, as he gave the address to the driver. "Faster!" he called out, looking first at his watch, and then at his father. "The minutes are precious this morning; and the old one is beginning to give in."

It was true. Still capable of hearing and of under-

standing, Mr. Bashwood was past speaking by this time. He clung with both hands to his son's grudging arm, and let his head fall helplessly on his son's averted shoulder.

The parish church stood back from the street, protected by gates and railings, and surrounded by a space of open ground. Shaking off his father's hold, Bashwood the younger made straight for the vestry. The clerk, putting away the books, and the clerk's assistant, hanging up a surplice, were the only persons in the room when he entered it, and asked leave to look at the marriage Register for the day.

The clerk gravely opened the book, and stood aside from the desk on which it lay.

The day's register comprised three marriages solemnized that morning — and the first two signatures on the page, were "Allan Armadale" and "Lydia Gwilt!"

Even the Spy — ignorant as he was of the truth; unsuspicious as he was of the terrible future consequences to which the act of that morning might lead — even the Spy started, when his eye first fell on the page. It was done! Come what might of it, it was done now. There, in black and white, was the registered evidence of the marriage, which was at once a truth in itself, and a lie in the conclusion to which it led! There — through the fatal similarity in the names — there, in Midwinter's own signature, was the proof to persuade everybody that, not Midwinter, but Allan, was the husband of Miss Gwilt!

Bashwood the younger closed the book, and returned it to the clerk. He descended the vestry steps with his hands thrust doggedly into his pockets, and

with a serious shock inflicted on his professional self-esteem.

The beadle met him under the church wall. He considered for a moment whether it was worth while to spend a shilling in questioning the man, and decided in the affirmative. If they could be traced and overtaken, there might be a chance of seeing the colour of Mr. Armadale's money, even yet.

"How long is it," he asked, "since the first couple married here this morning, left the church?"

"About an hour," said the beadle.

"How did they go away?"

The beadle deferred answering that second question until he had first pocketed his fee. "You won't trace them from here, sir," he said, when he had got his shilling. "They went away on foot."

"And that is all you know about it."

"That, sir, is all I know about it."

Left by himself, even the Detective of the Private Inquiry Office paused for a moment before he returned to his father at the gate. He was roused from his hesitation by the sudden appearance, within the church enclosure, of the driver of the cab.

"I'm afraid the old gentleman is going to be taken ill, sir," said the man.

Bashwood the younger frowned angrily, and walked back to the cab. As he opened the door and looked in, his father leaned forward and confronted him, with lips that moved speechlessly, and with a white stillness over all the rest of his face.

"She's done us," said the Spy. "They were married here this morning."

The old man's body swayed for a moment from

one side to the other. The instant after, his eyes closed, and his head fell forward towards the front seat of the cab. "Drive to the hospital!" cried his son. "He's in a fit. This is what comes of putting myself out of my way to please my father," he muttered, sullenly raising Mr. Bashwood's head, and loosening his cravat. "A nice morning's work. Upon my soul, a nice morning's work!"

The hospital was near, and the house-surgeon was at his post.

"Will he come out of it?" asked Bashwood the younger roughly.

"Who are *you?*" asked the surgeon sharply, on his side.

"I am his son."

"I shouldn't have thought it," rejoined the surgeon, taking the restoratives that were handed to him by the nurse, and turning from the son to the father with an air of relief which he was at no pains to conceal. "Yes," he added, after a minute or two. "Your father will come out of it, this time."

"When can he be moved away from here?"

"He can be moved from the hospital in an hour or two."

The Spy laid a card on the table. "I'll come back for him or send for him," he said. "I suppose I can go now, if I leave my name and address?" With those words, he put on his hat, and walked out.

"He's a brute!" said the nurse.

"No," said the surgeon quietly. "He's a man."

* * * * * *

Between nine and ten o'clock that night, Mr. Bashwood awoke in his bed at the inn in the Borough. He

had slept for some hours, since he had been brought back from the hospital; and his mind and body were now slowly recovering together.

A light was burning on the bedside-table, and a letter lay on it, waiting for him till he was awake. It was in his son's handwriting, and it contained these words: —

"My dear Dad, — Having seen you safe out of the hospital, and back at your hotel, I think I may fairly claim to have done my duty by you, and may consider myself free to look after my own affairs. Business will prevent me from seeing you to-night; and I don't think it at all likely I shall be in your neighbourhood to-morrow morning. My advice to you is, to go back to Thorpe-Ambrose, and to stick to your employment in the steward's office. Wherever Mr. Armadale may be, he must, sooner or later, write to you on business. I wash my hands of the whole matter, mind, so far as I am concerned, from this time forth. But if *you* like to go on with it, my professional opinion is (though you couldn't hinder his marriage), you may part him from his wife.

"Pray take care of yourself.

"Your affectionate Son,

"James Bashwood."

The letter dropped from the old man's feeble hands. "I wish Jemmy could have come to see me to-night," he thought. "But it's very kind of him to advise me all the same."

He turned wearily on the pillow, and read the letter a second time. "Yes," he said, "there's nothing

left for me but to go back. I'm too poor and too old to hunt after them all by himself." He closed his eyes: the tears trickled slowly over his wrinkled cheeks. "I've been a trouble to Jemmy," he murmured, faintly; "I've been a sad trouble, I'm afraid, to poor Jemmy!" In a minute more his weakness overpowered him, and he fell asleep again.

The clock of the neighbouring church struck. It was ten. As the bell tolled the hour, the tidal train — with Midwinter and his wife among the passengers — was speeding nearer and nearer to Paris. As the bell tolled the hour, the watch on board Allan's outward-bound yacht, had sighted the lighthouse off the Land's End, and had set the course of the vessel for Ushant and Finisterre.

THE END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

CHAPTER I.

Miss Gwilt's Diary.

"NAPLES, OCTOBER 10TH. — It is two months to day, since I declared that I had closed my Diary, never to open it again.

"Why I have broken my resolution? Why have I gone back to this secret friend of my wretchedest and wickedest hours? Because I am more friendless than ever; because I am more lonely than ever, though my husband is sitting writing in the next room to me. My misery is a woman's misery, and it *will* speak — here, rather than nowhere; to my second self, in this book, if I have no one else to hear me.

"How happy I was in the first days that followed our marriage, and how happy I made *him!* Only two months have passed, and that time is a bygone time already! I try to think of anything I might have said or done wrongly, on my side — of anything he might have said or done wrongly, on his — and I can remember nothing unworthy of my husband, nothing unworthy of myself. I cannot even lay my finger on the day when the cloud first rose between us.

"I could bear it, if I loved him less dearly than I do. I could conquer the misery of our estrangement if

he only showed the change in him as brutally as other men would show it.

"But this never has happened — never will happen. It is not in his nature to inflict suffering on others. Not a hard word, not a hard look, escapes him. It is only at night, when I hear him sighing in his sleep; and sometimes when I see him dreaming, in the morning hours, that I know how hopelessly I am losing the love he once felt for me. He hides, or tries to hide it, in the day, for my sake. He is all gentleness, all kindness — but his heart is not on his lips, when he kisses me now; his hand tells me nothing when it touches mine. Day after day, the hours that he gives to his hateful writing grow longer and longer; day after day, he becomes more and more silent, in the hours that he gives to Me.

"And, with all this, there is nothing that I can complain of — nothing marked enough to justify me in noticing it. His disappointment shrinks from all open confession; his resignation collects itself by such fine degrees that even my watchfulness fails to see the growth of it. Fifty times a day, I feel the longing in me, to throw my arms round his neck, and say, 'For God's sake, do anything to me, rather than treat me like this!' — and fifty times a day the words are forced back into my heart by the cruel considerateness of his conduct, which gives me no excuse for speaking them. I thought I had suffered the sharpest pain that I could feel, when my first husband laid his whip across my face. I thought I knew the worst that despair could do, on the day when I knew that the other villain, the meaner villain still, had cast me off. Live and learn. There is sharper pain than I felt under

Waldron's whip; there is bitterer despair than the despair I knew when Manuel deserted me.

"Am I too old for him? Surely not yet! Have I lost my beauty? Not a man passes me in the street but his eyes tell me I am as handsome as ever.

"Ah, no! no! the secret lies deeper than *that!* I have thought and thought about it, till a horrible fancy has taken possession of me. He has been noble and good in his past life, and I have been wicked and disgraced. Who can tell what a gap that dreadful difference may make between us, unknown to him and unknown to me? It is folly, it is madness — but when I lie awake by him in the darkness, I ask myself whether any unconscious disclosure of the truth escapes me in the close intimacy that now unites us? Is there an unutterable Something left by the horror of my past life, which clings invisibly to me still? And is *he* feeling the influence of it, sensibly, and yet incomprehensibly to himself? Oh me! is there no purifying power in such love as mine? Are there plague-spots of past wickedness on my heart which no after repentance can wash out?

"Who can tell? There is something wrong in our married life — I can only come back to that. There is some adverse influence that neither he nor I can trace, which is parting us farther and farther from each other, day by day. Well! I suppose I shall be hardened in time, and learn to bear it.

"An open carriage has just driven by my window, with a nicely-dressed lady in it. She had her husband by her side, and her children on the seat opposite. At the moment when I saw her she was laughing and talking in high spirits; a sparkling, light-hearted, happy

woman. Ah, my lady, when you were a few years younger, if you had been left to yourself, and thrown on the world like me ——"

October 11th. — The eleventh day of the month was the day (two months since) when we were married. He said nothing about it to me when we woke, nor I to him. But I thought I would make it the occasion, at breakfast-time, of trying to win him back.

"I don't think I ever took such pains with my toilette before; I don't think I ever looked better than I looked when I went downstairs this morning. He had breakfasted by himself, and I found a little slip of paper on the table with an apology written on it. The post to England, he said, went out that day, and his letter to the newspaper must be finished. In his place I would have let fifty posts go out, rather than breakfast without him. I went into his room. There he was, immersed body and soul in his hateful writing! 'Can't you give me a little time this morning?' I asked. He got up with a start. 'Certainly, if you wish it.' He never even looked at me as he said the words. The very sound of his voice told me that all his interest was centred in the pen that he had just laid down. 'I see you are occupied,' I said; 'I don't wish it.' Before I had closed the door on him he was back at his desk. I have often heard that the wives of authors have been for the most part unhappy women. And now I know why.

"I suppose, as I said yesterday, I shall learn to bear it. (What *stuff*, by the by, I seem to have written yesterday! how ashamed I should be if anybody saw it but myself!) I hope the trumpery newspaper

he writes for won't succeed! I hope his rubbishing letter will be well cut up by some other newspaper as soon as it gets into print!

"What am I to do with myself all the morning? I can't go out, — it's raining. If I open the piano, I shall disturb the industrious journalist who is scribbling in the next room. Oh dear, it was lonely enough in my lodging in Thorpe-Ambrose, but how much lonelier it is here. Shall I read? No; books don't interest me; I hate the whole tribe of authors. I think I shall look back through these pages, and live my life over again when I was plotting and planning, and finding a new excitement to occupy me in every new hour of the day.

"He might have looked at me, though he *was* so busy with his writing. He might have said, 'How nicely you are dressed this morning!' He might have remembered, — never mind what! All he remembers is the newspaper.

"*Twelve o'clock.* — I have been reading and thinking; and, thanks to my Diary, I have got through an hour.

"What a time it was, — what a life it was, at Thorpe-Ambrose! I wonder I kept my senses. It makes my heart beat, it makes my face flush, only to read about it now!

"The rain still falls, and the journalist still scribbles. I don't want to think the thoughts of that past time over again. And yet, what else can I do?

"Supposing — I only say supposing — I felt now, as I felt when I travelled to London with Armadale; and when I saw my way to his life as plainly as I saw the man himself all through the journey....?

"I'll go and look out of window. I'll go and count the people as they pass by.

"A funeral has gone by, with the penitents in their black hoods, and the wax torches sputtering in the wet, and the little bell ringing, and the priests droning their monotonous chant. A pleasant sight to meet me at the window! I shall go back to my Diary.

"Supposing I was not the altered woman I am — I only say, supposing — how would the Grand Risk that I once thought of running, look now? I have married Midwinter in the name that is really his own. And by doing that, I have taken the first of those three steps which were once to lead me, through Armadale's life, to the fortune and the station of Armadale's widow. No matter how innocent my intentions might have been on the wedding-day — and they *were* innocent — this is one of the unalterable results of the marriage. Well, having taken the first step, then, whether I would or no, how — supposing I meant to take the second step, which I don't — how would present circumstances stand towards me? Would they warn me to draw back, I wonder? or would they encourage me to go on?

"It will interest me to calculate the chances; and I can easily tear the leaf out, and destroy it, if the prospect looks too encouraging.

"We are living here (for economy's sake), far away from the expensive English quarter, in a suburb of the city, on the Portici side. We have made no travelling acquaintances among our own country-people. Our poverty is against us; Midwinter's shyness is against us; and (with the women) my personal appearance is against us. The men from whom my husband gets his

information for the newspaper, meet him at the café, and never come here. I discourage his bringing any strangers to see me; for, though years have passed since I was last at Naples, I cannot be sure that some of the many people I once knew in this place may not be living still. The moral of all this is (as the children's story-books say), that not a single witness has come to this house who could declare, if any after-inquiry took place in England, that Midwinter and I had been living here as man and wife. So much for present circumstances as they affect Me.

"Armadale next. Has any unforeseen accident led him to communicate with Thorpe-Ambrose? Has he broken the conditions which the major imposed on him, and asserted himself in the character of Miss Milroy's promised husband since I saw him last?

"Nothing of the sort has taken place. No unforeseen accident has altered his position — his tempting position — towards myself. I know all that has happened to him since he left England, through the letters which he writes to Midwinter, and which Midwinter shows to me.

"He has been wrecked, to begin with. His trumpery little yacht has actually tried to drown him, after all, and has failed! It happened (as Midwinter warned him it might happen with so small a vessel) in a sudden storm. They were blown ashore on the coast of Portugal. The yacht went to pieces, but the lives, and papers, and so on, were saved. The men have been sent back to Bristol, with recommendations from their master, which have already got them employment on board an outward-bound ship. And the master himself is on his way here, after stopping first at Lisbon, and

next at Gibraltar, and trying ineffectually in both places to supply himself with another vessel. His third attempt is to be made at Naples, where there is an English yacht 'laid up,' as they call it, to be had for sale or hire. He has had no occasion to write home since the wreck — for he took away from Coutts's the whole of the large sum of money lodged there for him, in circular notes. And he has felt no inclination to go back to England himself — for, with Mr. Brock dead, Miss Milroy at school, and Midwinter here, he has not a living creature in whom he is interested, to welcome him if he returned. To see *us*, and to see the new yacht, are the only two present objects he has in view. Midwinter has been expecting him for a week past, and he may walk into this very room in which I am writing, at this very moment, for all I know to the contrary.

"Tempting circumstances, these — with all the wrongs I have suffered at his mother's hands and at his, still alive in my memory; with Miss Milroy confidently waiting to take her place at the head of his household; with my dream of living happy and innocent in Midwinter's love, dispelled for ever, and with nothing left in its place to help me against myself. I wish it wasn't raining; I wish I could go out.

"Perhaps, something may happen to prevent Armadale from coming to Naples? When he last wrote, he was waiting at Gibraltar for an English steamer in the Mediterranean trade to bring him on here. He may get tired of waiting before the steamer comes, or he may hear of a yacht at some other place than this. A little bird whispers in my ear that it may possibly

be the wisest thing he ever did in his life, if he breaks his engagement to join us at Naples.

"Shall I tear out the leaf on which all these shocking things have been written? No. My Diary is so nicely bound — it would be positive barbarity to tear out a leaf. Let me occupy myself harmlessly with something else. What shall it be? My dressing-case — I will put my dressing-case tidy, and polish up the few little things in it which my misfortunes have still left in my possession.

"I have shut up the dressing-case again. The first thing I found in it was Armadale's shabby present to me on my marriage — the rubbishing little ruby ring. That irritated me to begin with. The second thing that turned up was my bottle of Drops. I caught myself measuring the doses with my eye, and calculating how many of them would be enough to take a living creature over the border-land between sleep and death. Why I should have locked the dressing-case in a fright, before I had quite completed my calculation, I don't know — but I did lock it. And here I am back again at my Diary, with nothing, absolutely nothing, to write about. Oh, the weary day! the weary day! Will nothing happen to excite me a little in this horrible place?

October 12th. — Midwinter's all-important letter to the newspaper was despatched by the post last night. I was foolish enough to suppose that I might be honoured by having some of his spare attention bestowed on me to-day. Nothing of the sort! He had a restless night, after all his writing, and got up with his head aching,

and his spirits miserably depressed. When he is in this state, his favourite remedy is to return to his old vagabond habits, and go roaming away by himself nobody knows where. He went through the form, this morning (knowing I had no riding habit), of offering to hire a little broken-kneed brute of a pony for me, in case I wished to accompany him! I preferred remaining at home. I will have a handsome horse and a handsome habit, or I won't ride at all. He went away, without attempting to persuade me to change my mind. I wouldn't have changed it of course; but he might have tried to persuade me all the same.

"I can open the piano, in his absence — that is one comfort. And I am in a fine humour for playing — that is another. There is a sonata of Beethoven's (I forget the number), which always suggests to me the agony of lost spirits in a place of torment. Come, my fingers and thumbs, and take me among the lost spirits, this morning!

"*October 13th.* — Our windows look out on the sea. At noon to-day, we saw a steamer coming in, with the English flag flying. Midwinter has gone to the port, on the chance that this may be the vessel from Gibraltar, with Armadale on board.

"*Two o'clock.* — It *is* the vessel from Gibraltar. Armadale has added one more to the long list of his blunders — he has kept his engagement to join us at Naples.

"How will it end, *now?*

"Who knows!

"*October 16th.* — Two days missed out of my Diary!

I can hardly tell why, unless it is that Armadale irritates me beyond all endurance. The mere sight of him takes me back to Thorpe-Ambrose. I fancy I must have been afraid of what I might write about him, in the course of the last two days, if I indulged myself in the dangerous luxury of opening these pages.

"This morning, I am afraid of nothing — and I take up my pen again accordingly.

"Is there any limit, I wonder, to the brutish stupidity of some men? I thought I had discovered Armadale's limit when I was his neighbour in Norfolk — but my later experience at Naples shows me that I was wrong. He is perpetually in and out of this house (crossing over to us in a boat from the hotel at Santa Lucia, where he sleeps); and he has exactly two subjects of conversation — the yacht for sale in the harbour here, and Miss Milroy. Yes! he selects ME as the confidante of his devoted attachment to the major's daughter! 'It's so nice to talk to a woman about it!' That is all the apology he has thought it necessary to make for appealing to my sympathies — *my* sympathies! — on the subject of 'his darling Neelie,' fifty times a day. He is evidently persuaded (if he thinks about it at all) that I have forgotten, as completely as he has forgotten, all that once passed between us, when I was first at Thorpe-Ambrose. Such an utter want of the commonest delicacy and the commonest tact, in a creature who is, to all appearance, possessed of a skin, and not a hide, and who does, unless my ears deceive me, talk, and not bray, is really quite incredible when one comes to think of it. But it is, for all that, quite true. He asked me — he actually asked me, last night — how many hundreds a year the wife of a rich man

could spend on her dress. 'Don't put it too low,' the idiot added, with his intolerable grin. 'Neelie shall be one of the best-dressed women in England when I have married her.' And this to me, after having had him at my feet, and then losing him again through Miss Milroy! This to me, with an Alpaca gown on, and a husband whose income must be helped by a newspaper!

"I had better not dwell on it any longer. I had better think and write of something else.

"The yacht. As a relief from hearing about Miss Milroy, I declare the yacht in the harbour is quite an interesting subject to me! She (the men call a vessel 'She;' and I suppose if the women took an interest in such things, *they* would call a vessel 'He'); she is a beautiful model; and her 'top-sides' (whatever they may be) are especially distinguished by being built of mahogany. But, with these merits, she has the defect, on the other hand, of being old — which is a sad drawback — and the crew and the sailing-master have been 'paid off,' and sent home to England — which is additionally distressing. Still, if a new crew and a new sailing-master can be picked up here, such a beautiful creature (with all her drawbacks) is not to be despised. It might answer to hire her for a cruise, and to see how she behaves. (If she is of *my* mind, her behaviour will rather astonish her new master!) The cruise will determine what faults she has, and what repairs, through the unlucky circumstance of her age, she really stands in need of. And then it will be time to settle, whether to buy her outright or not. Such is Armadale's conversation, when he is not talking of 'his darling Neelie.' And Midwinter, who can steal no time from his newspaper work, for his wife, can steal

hours for his friend, and can offer them unreservedly to my irresistible rival, the new yacht.

"I shall write no more, to-day. If so ladylike a person as I am could feel a tigerish tingling all over her to the very tips of her fingers, I should suspect myself of being in that condition at the present moment. But, with *my* manners and accomplishments, the thing is, of course, out of the question. We all know that a lady has no passions.

"*October 17th.* — A letter for Midwinter this morning, from the slave-owners — I mean the newspaper-people in London — which has set him at work again harder than ever. A visit at luncheon-time, and another visit at dinner-time from Armadale. Conversation at luncheon about the yacht. Conversation at dinner about Miss Milroy. I have been honoured, in regard to that young lady, by an invitation to go with Armadale to-morrow to the Toledo, and help him to buy some presents for the beloved object. I didn't fly out at him — I only made an excuse. Can words express the astonishment I feel at my own patience? No words can express it.

"*October 18th.* — Armadale came to breakfast this morning, by way of catching Midwinter before he shuts himself up over his work.

"Conversation the same as yesterday's conversation at lunch. Armadale has made his bargain with the agent for hiring the yacht. The agent (compassionating his total ignorance of the language) has helped him to find an interpreter, but can't help him to find a crew. The interpreter is civil and willing, but doesn't under-

stand the sea. Midwinter's assistance is indispensable; and Midwinter is requested (and consents!) to work harder than ever, so as to make time for helping his friend. When the crew is found, the merits and defects of the vessel are to be tried by a cruise to Sicily, with Midwinter on board to give his opinion. Lastly (in case she should feel lonely), the ladies' cabin is most obligingly placed at the disposal of Midwinter's wife. All this was settled at the breakfast-table; and it ended with one of Armadale's neatly-turned compliments, addressed to myself: — 'I mean to take Neelie sailing with me, when we are married. And you have such good taste, you will be able to tell me everything the ladies' cabin wants between that time and this.'

"If some women bring such men as this into the world, ought other women to allow them to live? It is a matter of opinion. *I* think not.

"What maddens me, is to see, as I do see plainly, that Midwinter finds in Armadale's company, and in Armadale's new yacht, a refuge from *me*. He is always in better spirits when Armadale is here. He forgets me in Armadale almost as completely as he forgets me in his work. And I bear it! What a pattern wife, what an excellent Christian I am!

"*October* 19*th*. — Nothing new. Yesterday over again.

"*October* 20*th*. — One piece of news. Midwinter is suffering from nervous headache; and is working in spite of it, to make time for his holiday with his friend.

"*October* 21*st*. — Midwinter is worse. Angry and

wild and unapproachable, after two bad nights, and two uninterrupted days at his desk. Under any other circumstances he would take the warning, and leave off. But nothing warns him now. He is still working as hard as ever, for Armadale's sake. How much longer will my patience last?

"*October 22nd.* — Signs, last night, that Midwinter is taxing his brains beyond what his brains will bear. When he did fall asleep, he was frightfully restless; groaning and talking and grinding his teeth. From some of the words I heard, he seemed at one time to be dreaming of his life when he was a boy, roaming the country with the dancing dogs. At another time he was back again with Armadale, imprisoned all night on the wrecked ship. Towards the early morning hours, he grew quieter. I fell asleep; and, waking after a short interval, found myself alone. My first glance round showed me a light burning in Midwinter's dressing-room. I rose softly, and went to look at him.

"He was seated in the great ugly old-fashioned chair, which I ordered to be removed into the dressing-room out of the way, when we first came here. His head lay back, and one of his hands hung listlessly over the arm of the chair. The other hand was on his lap. I stole a little nearer, and saw that exhaustion had overpowered him, while he was either reading or writing — for there were books, pens, ink, and paper on the table before him. What had he got up to do secretly, at that hour of the morning? I looked closer at the papers on the table. They were all neatly folded (as he usually keeps them), with one exception

— and that exception, lying open on the rest, was Mr. Brock's letter.

"I looked round at him again, after making this discovery, and then noticed for the first time another written paper, lying under the hand that rested on his lap. There was no moving it away without the risk of waking him. Part of the open manuscript, however, was not covered by his hand. I looked at it to see what he had secretly stolen away to read, besides Mr. Brock's letter — and made out enough to tell me that it was the Narrative of Armadale's Dream.

"That second discovery sent me back at once to my bed — with something serious to think of.

"Travelling through France, on our way to this place, Midwinter's shyness was conquered for once, by a very pleasant man — an Irish doctor — whom we met in the railway carriage, and who quite insisted on being friendly and sociable with us all through the day's journey. Finding that Midwinter was devoting himself to literary pursuits, our travelling companion warned him not to pass too many hours together at his desk. 'Your face tells me more than you think,' the doctor said. 'If you are ever tempted to overwork your brain, you will feel it sooner than most men. When you find your nerves playing you strange tricks, don't neglect the warning — drop your pen.'

"After my last night's discovery in the dressing-room, it looks as if Midwinter's nerves were beginning already to justify the doctor's opinion of them. If one of the tricks they are playing him, is the trick of tormenting him again with his old superstitious terrors, there will be a change in our lives here before long. I shall wait curiously to see whether the conviction

that we two are destined to bring fatal danger to Armadale, takes possession of Midwinter's mind once more. If it does, I know what will happen. He will not stir a step towards helping his friend to find a crew for the yacht; and he will certainly refuse to sail with Armadale, or to let me sail with him, on the trial cruise.

"*October 23rd.* — Mr. Brock's letter has, apparently, not lost its influence yet. Midwinter is working again to-day, and is as anxious as ever for the holiday-time that he is to pass with his friend.

"*Two o'clock.* — Armadale here as usual; eager to know when Midwinter will be at his service. No definite answer to be given to the question yet — seeing that it all depends on Midwinter's capacity to continue at his desk. Armadale sat down disappointed — he yawned, and put his great clumsy hands in his pockets. I took up a book. The brute didn't understand that I wanted to be left alone; he began again on the unendurable subject of Miss Milroy, and of all the fine things she was to have when he married her. Her own riding horse; her own pony carriage; her own beautiful little sitting-room upstairs at the great house, and so on. All that I might have had once, Miss Milroy is to have now — *if I let her.*

"*Six o'clock.* — More of the everlasting Armadale! Half an hour since, Midwinter came in from his writing, giddy and exhausted. I had been pining all day for a little music, and I knew they were giving *Norma* at the theatre here. It struck me that an hour or two at the opera might do Midwinter good, as well as me; and I said, 'Why not take a box at the San Carlo to-night?' He answered in a dull, uninterested manner,

that he was not rich enough to take a box. Armadale was present, and flourished his well-filled purse in his usual insufferable way. '*I'm* rich enough, old boy, and it comes to the same thing.' With those words, he took up his hat, and trampled out on his great elephant's feet, to get the box. I looked after him from the window, as he went down the street. 'Your widow, with her twelve hundred a year,' I thought to myself, 'might take a box at the San Carlo whenever she pleased, without being beholden to anybody.' The empty-headed wretch whistled as he went his way to the theatre, and tossed his loose silver magnificently to every beggar who ran after him.

* * * * *

"*Midnight.* — I am alone again at last. Have I nerve enough to write the history of this terrible evening, just as it has passed? I have nerve enough, at any rate, to turn to a new leaf, and try.

CHAPTER II.

The Diary Continued.

"We went to the San Carlo. Armadale's stupidity showed itself, even in such a simple matter as taking a box. He had confounded an opera with a play, and had chosen a box close to the stage, with the idea that one's chief object at a musical performance is to see the faces of the singers as plainly as possible! Fortunately for our ears, Bellini's lovely melodies are, for the most part, tenderly and delicately accompanied — or the orchestra might have deafened us.

"I sat back in the box at first, well out of sight;

for it was impossible to be sure that some of my old friends of former days at Naples might not be in the theatre. But the sweet music gradually tempted me out of my seclusion. I was so charmed and interested that I leaned forward without knowing it, and looked at the stage.

"I was made aware of my own imprudence, by a discovery which, for the moment, literally chilled my blood. One of the singers, among the chorus of Druids, was looking at me while he sang with the rest. His head was disguised in the long white hair, and the lower part of his face was completely covered with the flowing white beard, proper to the character. But the eyes with which he looked at me were the eyes of the one man on earth whom I have most reason to dread ever seeing again — Manuel!

"If it had not been for my smelling-bottle, I believe I should have lost my senses. As it was, I drew back again into the shadow. Even Armadale noticed the sudden change in me: he, as well as Midwinter, asked if I was ill. I said I felt the heat, but hoped I should be better presently — and then leaned back in the box, and tried to rally my courage. I succeeded in recovering self-possession enough to be able to look again at the stage (without showing myself) the next time the chorus appeared. There was the man again! But to my infinite relief, he never looked towards our box a second time. This welcome indifference, on his part, helped to satisfy me that I had seen an extraordinary accidental resemblance, and nothing more. I still hold to this conclusion, after having had leisure to think — but my mind would be more completely at ease than it is, if I had seen the rest of the man's

face, without the stage disguises that hid it from all investigation.

"When the curtain fell on the first act, there was a tiresome ballet to be performed (according to the absurd Italian custom), before the opera went on. Though I had got over my first fright, I had been far too seriously startled to feel comfortable in the theatre. I dreaded all sorts of impossible accidents — and when Midwinter and Armadale put the question to me, I told them I was not well enough to stay through the rest of the performance.

"At the door of the theatre, Armadale proposed to say good-night. But Midwinter — evidently dreading the evening with *me* — asked him to come back to supper, if I had no objection. I said the necessary words — and we all three returned together to this house.

"Ten minutes' quiet in my own room (assisted by a little dose of Eau-de-Cologne and water) restored me to myself. I joined the men at the supper-table. They received my apologies for taking them away from the opera, with the complimentary assurance that I had not cost either of them the slightest sacrifice of his own pleasure. Midwinter declared that he was too completely worn out to care for anything but the two great blessings, unattainable at the theatre, of quiet and fresh air. Armadale said — with an Englishman's exasperating pride in his own stupidity, wherever a matter of Art is concerned — that he couldn't make head or tail of the performance. The principal disappointment, he was good enough to add, was mine, for I evidently understood foreign music, and enjoyed it. Ladies generally did. His darling little Neelie —

"I was in no humour to be persecuted with his 'Darling Neelie' after what I had gone through at the theatre. It might have been the irritated state of my nerves, or it might have been the Eau-de-Cologne flying to my head — but the bare mention of the girl seemed to set me in a flame. I tried to turn Armadale's attention in the direction of the supper-table. He was much obliged, but he had no appetite for more. I offered him wine next — the wine of the country, which is all that our poverty allows us to place on the table. He was much obliged again. The foreign wine was very little more to his taste than the foreign music; but he would take some because I asked him; and he would drink my health in the old-fashioned way — with his best wishes for the happy time when we should all meet again at Thorpe-Ambrose, and when there would be a mistress to welcome me at the great house.

"Was he mad to persist in this way? No; his face answered for him. He was under the impression that he was making himself particularly agreeable to me.

"I looked at Midwinter. He might have seen some reason for interfering to change the conversation, if he had looked at me in return. But he sat silent in his chair, irritable and overworked, with his eyes on the ground, thinking.

"I got up and went to the window. Still impenetrable to a sense of his own clumsiness, Armadale followed me. If I had been strong enough to toss him out of the window into the sea, I should certainly have done it at that moment. Not being strong enough, I looked steadily at the view over the bay, and gave him a hint, the broadest and rudest I could think of, to go.

"'A lovely night for a walk,' I said, 'if you are tempted to walk back to the hotel.'

"I doubt if he heard me. At any rate I produced no sort of effect on him. He stood staring sentimentally at the moonlight; and — there is really no other word to express it — *blew* a sigh. I felt a presentiment of what was coming, unless I stopped his mouth by speaking first.

"'With all your fondness for England,' I said, 'you must own that we have no such moonlight as that at home.'

"He looked at me vacantly, and blew another sigh.

'"I wonder whether it is fine to-night in England as it is here?' he said. 'I wonder whether my dear little girl at home is looking at the moonlight, and thinking of Me?'

"I could endure it no longer. I flew out at him at last.

"'Good heavens, Mr. Armadale!' I exclaimed, 'is there only one subject worth mentioning, in the narrow little world you live in? I'm sick to death of Miss Milroy. Do pray talk of something else?'

"His great broad stupid face coloured up to the roots of his hideous yellow hair. 'I beg your pardon,' he stammered, with a kind of sulky surprise. 'I didn't suppose —' he stopped confusedly, and looked from me to Midwinter. I understood what the look meant. 'I didn't suppose she could be jealous of Miss Milroy after marrying *you!*" That is what he would have said to Midwinter, if I had left them together in the room!

"As it was, Midwinter had heard us. Before I

could speak again — before Armadale could add another word — he finished his friend's uncompleted sentence, in a tone that I now heard, and with a look that I now saw, for the first time.

"'You didn't suppose, Allan,' he said, 'that a lady's temper could be so easily provoked.'

"The first bitter word of irony, the first hard look of contempt, I had ever had from him! And Armadale the cause of it!

"My anger suddenly left me. Something came in its place, which steadied me in an instant, and took me silently out of the room.

"I sat down alone in the bed-room. I had a few minutes of thought with myself, which I don't choose to put into words, even in these secret pages. I got up, and unlocked — never mind what. I went round to Midwinter's side of the bed, and took — no matter what I took. The last thing I did, before I left the room, was to look at my watch. It was half-past ten; Armadale's usual time for leaving us. I went back at once and joined the two men again.

"I approached Armadale good-humouredly, and said to him, —

"No! On second thoughts, I won't put down what I said to him — or what I did, afterwards. I'm sick of Armadale! he turns up at every second word I write. I shall pass over what happened in the course of the next hour — the hour between half-past ten and half-past eleven — and take up my story again at the time when Armadale had left us. Can I tell what took place, as soon as our visitor's back was turned, between Midwinter and me in our own

room? Why not pass over what happened, in that case as well as in the other? Why agitate myself by writing it down? I don't know! Why do I keep a diary at all? Why did the clever thief the other day (in the English newspapers) keep the very thing to convict him, in the shape of a record of every thing he stole? Why are we not perfectly reasonable in all that we do? Why am I not always on my guard and never inconsistent with myself, like a wicked character in a novel? Why? why? why?

"I don't care why! I must write down what happened between Midwinter and me to-night, *because* I must. There's a reason which nobody can answer — myself included.

* * * * *

"It was half-past eleven. Armadale had gone. I had put on my dressing-gown, and had just sat down to arrange my hair for the night, when I was surprised by a knock at the door — and Midwinter came in.

"He was frightfully pale. His eyes looked at me with a terrible despair in them. He never answered when I expressed my surprise at his coming in so much sooner than usual; he wouldn't even tell me, when I asked the question, if he was ill. Pointing peremptorily to the chair from which I had risen on his entering the room, he told me to sit down again; and then after a moment, added these words: — 'I have something serious to say to you.'

"I thought of what I had done — or, no, of what I had tried to do — in that interval between half-past ten and half-past eleven, which I have left unnoticed in my diary — and the deadly sickness of

terror, which I never felt at the time, came upon me now. I sat down again, as I had been told, without speaking to Midwinter, and without looking at him.

"He took a turn up and down the room, and then came and stood over me.

"'If Allan comes here to-morrow,' he began, 'and if you see him —'

"His voice faltered, and he said no more. There was some dreadful grief at his heart that was trying to master him. But there are times when his will is a will of iron. He took another turn in the room, and crushed it down. He came back, and stood over me again.

"'When Allan comes here to-morrow,' he resumed, 'let him come into my room if he wants to see me. I shall tell him that I find it impossible to finish the work I now have on hand as soon as I had hoped, and that he must, therefore, arrange to find a crew for the yacht, without any assistance on my part. If he comes, in his disappointment, to appeal to you — give him no hope of my being free in time to help him, if he waits. Encourage him to take the best assistance he can get from strangers, and to set about manning the yacht without any further delay. The more occupation he has to keep him away from this house; and the less you encourage him to stay here, if he does come, the better I shall be pleased. Don't forget that, and don't forget one last direction which I have now to give you. When the vessel is ready for sea, and when Allan invites us to sail with him, it is my wish that you should positively decline to go. He will try to make you change your mind — for I shall, of

course, decline, on my side, to leave you in this strange house and in this foreign country by yourself. No matter what he says, let nothing persuade you to alter your decision. Refuse, positively and finally! Refuse, I insist on it, to set your foot on the new yacht!'

"He ended quietly and firmly — with no faltering in his voice, and no signs of hesitation or relenting in his face. The sense of surprise which I might otherwise have felt at the strange words he had addressed to me, was lost in the sense of relief that they brought to my mind. The dread of *those other words* that I had expected to hear from him, left me as suddenly as it had come. I could look at him, I could speak to him once more.

"'You may depend,' I answered, 'on my doing exactly what you order me to do. Must I obey you blindly? Or may I know your reason for the extraordinary directions you have just given to me?'

"His face darkened, and he sat down on the other side of my dressing-table, with a heavy, hopeless sigh.

"'You may know the reason,' he said, 'if you wish it.' He waited a little, and considered. 'You have a right to know the reason,' he resumed, 'for you yourself are concerned in it.' He waited a little again, and again went on. 'I can only explain the strange request I have just made to you, in one way,' he said. 'I must ask you to recall what happened in the next room, before Allan left us to-night.'

"He looked at me with a strange mixture of expressions in his face. At one moment I thought he felt pity for me. At another, it seemed more like

horror of me. I began to feel frightened again; I waited for his next words in silence.

"'I know that I have been working too hard lately,' he went on, 'and that my nerves are sadly shaken. It is possible, in the state I am in now, that I may have unconsciously misinterpreted, or distorted the circumstances that really took place. You will do me a favour if you will test my recollection of what has happened by your own. If my fancy has exaggerated anything, if my memory is playing me false anywhere, I entreat you to stop me, and tell me of it.'

"I commanded myself sufficiently to ask what the circumstances were to which he referred, and in what way I was personally concerned in them.

"You were personally concerned in them, in this way,' he answered. 'The circumstances to which I refer, began with your speaking to Allan about Miss Milroy, in what I thought, a very inconsiderate and very impatient manner. I am afraid I spoke just as petulantly on my side — and I beg your pardon for what I said to you in the irritation of the moment. You left the room. After a short absence, you came back again, and made a perfectly proper apology to Allan, which he received with his usual kindness and sweetness of temper. While this went on, you and he were both standing by the supper-table; and Allan resumed some conversation which had already passed between you about the Neapolitan wine. He said he thought he should learn to like it in time, and he asked leave to take another glass of the wine we had on the table. Am I right so far?'

"The words almost died on my lips; but I forced them out, and answered him that he was right so far.

"'You took the flask out of Allan's hand,' he proceeded. 'You said to him, good-humouredly, ""You know you don't really like the wine, Mr. Armadale. Let me make you something which may be more to your taste. I have a receipt of my own for lemonade. Will you favour me by trying it?"" In those words, you made your proposal to him, and he accepted it. Did he also ask leave to look on, and learn how the lemonade was made? and did you tell him that he would only confuse you, and that you would give him the receipt in writing, if he wanted it?'

"This time, the words did really die on my lips. I could only bow my head, and answer 'Yes' mutely in that way. Midwinter went on.

"'Allan laughed, and went to the window to look out at the Bay, and I went with him. After a while, Allan remarked, jocosely, that the mere sound of the liquids you were pouring out, made him thirsty. When he said this, I turned round from the window. I approached you, and said the lemonade took a long time to make. You touched me, as I was walking away again, and handed me the tumbler filled to the brim. At the same time, Allan turned round from the window; and I, in my turn, handed the tumbler to *him*. — Is there any mistake so far?'

"The quick throbbing of my heart almost choked me. I could just shake my head — I could do no more.

"'I saw Allan raise the tumbler to his lips. — Did *you* see it? I saw his face turn white, in an instant. — Did *you?* I saw the glass fall from his hand on the floor. I saw him stagger, and caught him before he fell. Are these things true? For God's sake, search your memory, and tell me — are these things true?'

"The throbbing at my heart seemed, for one breathless instant, to stop. The next moment something fiery, something maddening, flew through me. I started to my feet, with my temper in a flame, reckless of all consequences, desperate enough to say anything.

"'Your questions are an insult! Your looks are an insult!' I burst out. "*Do you think I tried to poison him?*'

"The words rushed out of my lips in spite of me. They were the last words under heaven that any woman, in such a situation as mine, ought to have spoken. And yet I spoke them!

"He rose in alarm, and gave me my smelling-bottle. 'Hush! hush!' he said. 'You, too, are overwrought — you, too, are over excited by all that has happened to-night. You are talking wildly and shockingly. Good God! how can you have so utterly misunderstood me? Compose yourself — pray, compose yourself.'

"He might as well have told a wild animal to compose herself. Having been mad enough to say the words, I was mad enough next, to return to the subject of the lemonade, in spite of his entreaties to me to be silent.

"'I told you what I had put in the glass, the moment Mr. Armadale fainted,' I went on; insisting furiously on defending myself, when no attack was made on me. 'I told you I had taken the flask of brandy which you keep at your bedside, and mixed some of it with the lemonade. How could I know that he had a nervous horror of the smell and taste of brandy? Didn't he say to me himself, when he came to his senses, It's my fault; I ought to have warned you to

put no brandy in it? Didn't he remind you, afterwards, of the time when you and he were in the Isle of Man together, and when the Doctor there innocently made the same mistake with him that I made to-night?"

["I laid a great stress on my innocence — and with some reason too. Whatever else I may be, I pride myself on not being a hypocrite. I *was* innocent — so far as the brandy was concerned. I had put it into the lemonade, in pure ignorance of Armadale's nervous peculiarity, to disguise the taste of — never mind what! Another of the things I pride myself on is, that I never wander from my subject. What Midwinter said next, is what I ought to be writing about now.]

"He looked at me for a moment, as if he thought I had taken leave of my senses. Then he came round to my side of the table, and stood over me again.

"'If nothing else will satisfy you that you are entirely misinterpreting my motives,' he said, 'and that I haven't an idea of blaming *you* in the matter — read this.'

"He took a paper from the breast-pocket of his coat, and spread it open under my eyes. It was the Narrative of Armadale's Dream.

"In an instant the whole weight on my mind was lifted off it. I felt mistress of myself again — I understood him at last.

"'Do you know what this is?' he asked. 'Do you remember what I said to you at Thorpe-Ambrose, about Allan's Dream? I told you, then, that two out of the three Visions had already come true. I tell you now, that the third Vision has been fulfilled in this house to-night.'

"He turned over the leaves of the manuscript, and pointed to the lines that he wished me to read.

"I read these, or nearly read these words, from the Narrative of the Dream, as Midwinter had taken it down from Armadale's own lips: —

"'The darkness opened for the third time, and showed me the Shadow of the Man, and the Shadow of the Woman together. The Man-Shadow was the nearest; the Woman-Shadow stood back. From where she stood, I heard a sound like the pouring out of a liquid softly. I saw her touch the Shadow of the Man with one hand, and give him a glass with the other. He took the glass, and handed it to me. At the moment when I put it to my lips, a deadly faintness overcame me. When I recovered my senses again, the Shadows had vanished, and the Vision was at an end."

"For the moment, I was as completely staggered by this extraordinary coincidence as Midwinter himself.

"He put one hand on the open Narrative, and laid the other heavily on my arm.

"'*Now* do you understand my motive in coming here?' he asked. '*Now* do you see that the last hope I had to cling to, was the hope that your memory of the night's events might prove my memory to be wrong? *Now* do you know why I won't help Allan? Why I won't sail with him? Why I am plotting and lying, and making you plot and lie too, to keep my best and dearest friend out of the house?'

"'Have you forgotten Mr. Brock's letter?' I asked.

"He struck his hand passionately on the open ma-

nuscript. 'If Mr. Brock had lived to see what we have seen to-night, he would have felt what I feel, he would have said what I say!' His voice sank mysteriously, and his great black eyes glittered at me as he made that answer. 'Thrice the Shadows of the Vision warned Allan in his sleep,' he went on; 'and thrice those Shadows have been embodied in the after-time by You and by Me! You, and no other, stood in the Woman's place at the pool. I, and no other, stood in the Man's place at the window. And you and I together, when the last Vision showed the Shadows together, stand in the Man's place and the Woman's place still! For *this*, the miserable day dawned when you and I first met. For *this*, your influence drew me to you, when my better angel warned me to fly the sight of your face. There is a curse on our lives! there is a fatality in our footsteps! Allan's future depends on his separation from us at once and for ever. Drive him from the place we live in, and the air we breathe. Force him among strangers — the worst and wickedest of them will be more harmless to him than we are! Let his yacht sail, though he goes on his knees to ask us, without You and without Me — and let him know how I loved him in another world than this, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest!'

"His grief conquered him — his voice broke into a sob when he spoke those last words. He took the Narrative of the Dream from the table, and left me as abruptly as he had come in.

"As I heard his door locked between us, my mind went back to what he had said to me, about myself. In remembering 'the miserable day' when we first saw

each other, and 'the better angel' that had warned him to 'fly the sight of my face,' I forgot all else. It doesn't matter what I felt. I wouldn't own it, even if I had a friend to speak to. Who cares for the misery of such a woman as I am? who believes in it? Besides, he spoke under the influence of a mad superstition that has got possession of him again. There is every excuse for *him* — there is no excuse for *me*. If I can't help being fond of him, through it all, I must take the consequences and suffer. I deserve to suffer; I deserve neither love nor pity from anybody. — Good heavens, what a fool I am! And how unnatural all this would be, if it was written in a book!

"It has struck one. I can hear Midwinter still, pacing to and fro in his room.

"He is thinking, I suppose? Well! I can think too. What am I to do next? I shall wait and see. Events take odd turns, sometimes — and events may justify the fatalism of the amiable man in the next room, who curses the day when he first saw my face. He may live to curse it for other reasons than he has now. If I *am* the Woman pointed at in the Dream, there will be another temptation put in my way before long — and there will be no brandy in Armadale's lemonade if I mix it for him a second time.

"*October 24th.* — Barely twelve hours have passed since I wrote my yesterday's entry — and that other temptation has come, tried, and conquered me already!

"This time there was no alternative. Instant exposure and ruin stared me in the face — I had no choice but to yield in my own defence. In plainer words still, it was no accidental resemblance that startled me

at the theatre last night. The chorus-singer at the opera was Manuel himself!

"Not ten minutes after Midwinter had left the sitting-room for his study, the woman of the house came in with a dirty little three-cornered note in her hand. One look at the writing on the address was enough. He had recognized me in the box; and the ballet between the acts of the opera had given him time to trace me home. I drew that plain conclusion in the moment that elapsed before I opened the letter. It informed me, in two lines, that he was waiting in a by-street, leading to the beach; and that, if I failed to make my appearance in ten minutes, he should interpret my absence as an invitation to him to call at the house.

"What I went through yesterday, must have hardened me, I suppose. At any rate, after reading the letter, I felt more like the woman I once was than I have felt for months past. I put on my bonnet, and went downstairs, and left the house as if nothing had happened.

"He was waiting for me at the entrance to the street.

"In the instant when we stood face to face, all my wretched life with him came back to me. I thought of my trust that he had betrayed; I thought of the cruel mockery of a marriage that he had practised on me, when he knew that he had a wife living; I thought of the time when I had felt despair enough at his desertion of me to attempt my own life. When I recalled all this, and when the comparison between Midwinter and the mean, miserable villain whom I had once believed in, forced itself into my mind, I knew, for the first time, what a woman feels when every atom of

respect for herself has left her. If he had personally insulted me, at that moment, I believe I should have submitted to it.

"But he had no idea of insulting me, in the more brutal meaning of the word. He had me at his mercy, and his way of making me feel it was to behave with an elaborate mockery of penitence and respect. I let him speak as he pleased, without interrupting him, without looking at him a second time, without even allowing my dress to touch him, as we walked together towards the quieter part of the beach. I had noticed the wretched state of his clothes, and the greedy glitter in his eyes, in my first look at him. And I knew it would end — as it did end — in a demand on me for money.

"Yes! After taking from me the last farthing I possessed of my own, and the last farthing I could extort for him from my old mistress, he turned on me as we stood by the margin of the sea, and asked if I could reconcile it to my conscience to let him be wearing such a coat as he then had on his back, and earning his miserable living as a chorus-singer at the opera!

"My disgust, rather than my indignation, roused me into speaking to him at last.

"'You want money,' I said. 'Suppose I am too poor to give it to you?'

"'In that case,' he replied, 'I shall be forced to remember that you are a treasure in yourself. And I shall be under the painful necessity of pressing my claim to you on the attention of one of those two gentlemen whom I saw with you at the opera — the gentleman, of course, who is now honoured by your pre-

ference, and who lives provisionally in the light of your smiles.'

"I made him no answer — for I had no answer to give. Disputing his right to claim me from anybody, would have been a mere waste of words. He knew as well as I did that he had not the shadow of a claim on me. But the mere attempt to raise it would, as he was well aware, lead necessarily to the exposure of my whole past life.

"Still keeping silence, I looked out over the sea. I don't know why — except that I instinctively looked anywhere rather than look at *him*.

"A little sailing boat was approaching the shore. The man steering was hidden from me by the sail; but the boat was so near that I thought I recognized the flag on the mast. I looked at my watch. Yes! It was Armadale coming over from Santa Lucia, at his usual time, to visit us in his usual way.

"Before I had put my watch back in my belt, the means of extricating myself from the frightful position I was placed in showed themselves to me as plainly as I see them now.

"I turned and led the way to the higher part of the beach, where some fishing-boats were drawn up which completely screened us from the view of any one landing on the shore below. Seeing probably that I had a purpose of some kind, Manuel followed me without uttering a word. As soon as we were safely under the shelter of the boats, I forced myself, in my own defence, to look at him again.

"'What should you say,' I asked, 'if I was rich instead of poor? What should you say if I could afford to give you a hundred pounds?'

"He started. I saw plainly that he had not expected so much as half the sum I had mentioned. It is needless to add that his tongue lied, while his face spoke the truth; and that when he replied to me, the answer was, 'Nothing like enough.'

"'Suppose,' I went on, without taking any notice of what he had said, 'that I could show you a way of helping yourself to twice as much — three times as much — five times as much as a hundred pounds, are you bold enough to put out your hand, and take it?'

"The greedy glitter came into his eyes once more. His voice dropped low, in breathless expectation of my next words.

"'Who is the person?' he asked. 'And what is the risk?'

"I answered him at once, in the plainest terms. I threw Armadale to him, as I might have thrown a piece of meat to a wild beast who was pursuing me.

"'The person is a rich young Englishman,' I said. 'He has just hired the yacht called the *Dorothea*, in the harbour here; and he stands in need of a sailing-master and a crew. You were once an officer in the Spanish navy — you speak English and Italian perfectly — you are thoroughly well acquainted with Naples and all that belongs to it. The rich young Englishman is ignorant of the language; and the interpreter who assists him knows nothing of the sea. He is at his wits' end for want of useful help in this strange place; he has no more knowledge of the world than that child who is digging holes there with a stick in the sand; and he carries all his money with him in circular notes. So much for the person. As for the risk, estimate it for yourself.'

"The greedy glitter in his eyes grew brighter and brighter with every word I said. He was plainly ready to face the risk, before I had done speaking.

"'When can I see the Englishman?' he asked eagerly.

"I moved to the seaward end of the fishing-boat, and saw that Armadale was at that moment disembarking on the shore.

"'You can see him now,' I answered, and pointed to the place.

"After a long look at Armadale walking carelessly up the slope of the beach, Manuel drew back again under the shelter of the boat. He waited a moment, considering something carefully with himself, and put another question to me — in a whisper this time.

"'When the vessel is manned,' he said, 'and the Englishman sails from Naples, how many friends sail with him?'

"'He has but two friends here,' I replied — 'that other gentleman whom you saw with me at the opera, and myself. He will invite us both to sail with him — and when the time comes, we shall both refuse.'

"'Do you answer for that?'

"'I answer for it positively.'

"He walked a few steps away, and stood with his face hidden from me, thinking again. All I could see was, that he took off his hat, and passed his handkerchief over his forehead. All I could hear was, that he talked to himself excitedly in his own language.

"There was a change in him when he came back.

His face had turned to a livid yellow, and his eyes looked at me with a hideous distrust.

"'One last question,' he said, and suddenly came closer to me, suddenly spoke with a marked emphasis on his next words. "*What is your interest in this?*'

"I started back from him. The question reminded me that I *had* an interest in the matter, which was entirely unconnected with the interest of keeping Manuel and Midwinter apart. Thus far, I had only remembered that Midwinter's fatalism had smoothed the way for me, by abandoning Armadale beforehand to any stranger who might come forward to help him. Thus far, the sole object I had kept in view was to protect myself, by the sacrifice of Armadale, from the exposure that threatened me. I tell no lies to my Diary. I don't affect to have felt a moment's consideration for the interests of Armadale's purse, or the safety of Armadale's life. I hated him too savagely to care what pitfalls my tongue might be the means of opening under his feet. But I certainly did *not* see (until that last question was put to me) that, in serving his own designs, Manuel might — if he dared go all lengths for the money — be serving my designs too. The one overpowering anxiety to protect myself from exposure before Midwinter, had (I suppose) filled all my mind, to the exclusion of everything else.

"Finding that I made no reply for the moment, Manuel reiterated his question, putting it in a new form.

"'You have cast your Englishman at me,' he said, 'like the sop to Cerberus. Would you have been quite

so ready to do that, if you had not had a motive of your own? I repeat my question. *You* have an interest in this — what is it?'

"'I have two interests,' I answered. 'The interest of forcing you to respect my position here; and the interest of ridding myself of the sight of you, at once and for ever!' I spoke with a boldness he had not yet heard from me. The sense that I was making the villain an instrument in my hands, and forcing him to help my purpose blindly, while he was helping his own, roused my spirits, and made me feel like myself again.

"He laughed. 'Strong language, on certain occasions, is a lady's privilege,' he said. 'You may, or may not, rid yourself of the sight of me, at once and for ever. We will leave that question to be settled in the future. But your other interest in this matter puzzles me. You have told me all I need know about the Englishman and his yacht, and you have made no conditions before you opened your lips. Pray, how are you to force me, as you say, to respect your position here?'

"'I will tell you how,' I rejoined. 'You shall hear my conditions first. I insist on your leaving me in five minutes more. I insist on your never again coming near the house where I live; and I forbid your attempting to communicate in any way, either with me, or with that other gentleman whom you saw with me at the theatre ——'

"'And suppose I say no?' he interposed. 'In that case, what will you do?'

"'In that case,' I answered, 'I shall say two words in [illegible]e rich young Englishman — and you

will find yourself back again among the chorus at the opera.'

"'You are a bold woman to take it for granted that I have my designs on the Englishman already, and that I am certain to succeed in them. How do you know ——?'

"'I know *you*,' I said. 'And that is enough.'

"There was a moment's silence between us. He looked at me — and I looked at him. We understood each other.

"He was the first to speak. The villanous smile died out of his face, and his voice dropped again distrustfully to its lowest tones.

"'I accept your terms,' he said. 'As long as your lips are closed, my lips shall be closed too — except in the event of my finding that you have deceived me; in which case the bargain is at an end, and you will see me again. I shall present myself to the Englishman to-morrow, with the necessary credentials to establish me in his confidence. Tell me his name?'

"I told it.

"'Give me his address?'

"I gave it — and turned to leave him. Before I had stepped out of the shelter of the boats, I heard him behind me again.

"'One last word,' he said. 'Accidents sometimes happen at sea. Have you interest enough in the Englishman — if an accident happens in his case — to wish to know what has become of him?'

"I stopped, and considered on my side. I had plainly failed to persuade him that I had no secret interest to serve, in placing Armadale's money, and (as a probable consequence) Armadale's life, at his mercy.

And it was now equally clear that he was cunningly attempting to associate himself with my private objects (whatever they might be), by opening a means of communication between us in the future. There could be no hesitation about how to answer him, under such circumstances as these. If the 'accident' at which he hinted did really happen to Armadale, I stood in no need of Manuel's intervention to give me the intelligence of it. An easy search through the obituary columns of the English papers would tell me the news — with the great additional advantage that the papers might be relied on, in such a matter as this, to tell the truth. I formally thanked Manuel, and declined to accept his proposal. 'Having no interest in the Englishman,' I said, 'I have no wish whatever to know what becomes of him.'

"He looked at me for a moment with steady attention, and with an interest in me which he had not shown yet.

"'What the game you are playing may be,' he rejoined, speaking slowly and significantly, 'I don't pretend to know. But I venture on a prophecy nevertheless — *you will win it!* If we ever meet again, remember I said that.' He took off his hat, and bowed to me gravely. 'Go your way, madam. And leave me to go mine!'

"With those words, he released me from the sight of him. I waited a minute alone, to recover myself in the air — and then returned to the house.

"The first object that met my eyes on entering the sitting-room, was — Armadale himself!

"He was waiting on the chance of seeing me, to beg that I would exert my influence with his friend. I

made the needful inquiry as to what he meant, and found that Midwinter had spoken as he had warned me he would speak when he and Armadale next met. He had announced that he was unable to finish his work for the newspaper as soon as he had hoped; and he had advised Armadale to find a crew for the yacht without waiting for any assistance on his part.

"All that it was necessary for me to do, on hearing this, was to perform the promise I had made to Midwinter, when he gave me my directions how to act in the matter. Armadale's vexation on finding me resolved not to interfere, expressed itself in the form of all others that is most personally offensive to me. He declined to believe my reiterated assurances that I possessed no influence to exert in his favour. 'If I was married to Neelie,' he said, 'she could do anything she liked with me; and I am sure, when you choose, you can do anything you like with Midwinter.' If the infatuated fool had actually tried to stifle the last faint struggles of remorse and pity left stirring in my heart, he could have said nothing more fatally to the purpose than this! I gave him a look which effectually silenced him so far as I was concerned. He went out of the room grumbling and growling to himself. 'It's all very well to talk about manning the yacht. I don't speak a word of their gibberish here — and the interpreter thinks a fisherman and a sailor mean the same thing. Hang me if I know what to do with the vessel, now I have got her!'

"He will probably know by to-morrow. And if he only comes here as usual, I shall know too!

"*October 25th, Ten at night.* — Manuel has got him!

"He has just left us, after staying here more than an hour, and talking the whole time of nothing but his own wonderful luck in finding the very help he wanted, at the time when he needed it most.

"At noon to-day, he was on the Mole, it seems, with his interpreter, trying vainly to make himself understood by the vagabond population of the water-side. Just as he was giving it up in despair, a stranger standing by (Manuel had followed him, I suppose, to the Mole from his hotel) kindly interfered to put things right. He said, 'I speak your language and their language, sir. I know Naples well; and I have been professionally accustomed to the sea. Can I help you?' The inevitable result followed. Armadale shifted all his difficulties on to the shoulders of the polite stranger, in his usual helpless, headlong way. His new friend, however, insisted, in the most honourable manner, on complying with the customary formalities before he would consent to take the matter into his own hands. He begged leave to wait on Mr. Armadale, with his testimonials to character and capacity. The same afternoon he had come by appointment to the hotel, with all his papers, and with 'the saddest story' of his sufferings and privations as 'a political refugee' that Armadale had ever heard. The interview was decisive. Manuel left the hotel, commissioned to find a crew for the yacht, and to fill the post of sailing-master on the trial cruise.

"I watched Midwinter anxiously, while Armadale was telling us these particulars; and afterwards, when he produced the new sailing-master's testimonials, which he had brought with him for his friend to see.

"For the moment, Midwinter's superstitious mis-

givings seemed to be all lost in his natural anxiety for his friend. He examined the stranger's papers — after having told me that the sooner Armadale was in the hands of strangers the better! — with the closest scrutiny and the most business-like distrust. It is needless to say that the credentials were as perfectly regular and satisfactory as credentials could be. When Midwinter handed them back, his colour rose: he seemed to feel the inconsistency of his conduct, and to observe for the first time that I was present noticing it. 'There is nothing to object to in the testimonials, Allan: I am glad you have got the help you want at last.' That was all he said, at parting. As soon as Armadale's back was turned, I saw no more of him. He has locked himself up again for the night, in his own room.

"There is now — so far as I am concerned — but one anxiety left. When the yacht is ready for sea, and when I decline to occupy the lady's cabin, will Midwinter hold to his resolution, and refuse to sail without me?

"*October 26th.* — Warnings already of the coming ordeal. A letter from Armadale to Midwinter, which Midwinter has just sent in to me. Here it is: —

"'DEAR MID, — I am too busy to come to-day. Get on with your work, for heaven's sake! The new sailing-master is a man of ten thousand. He has got an Englishman whom he knows, to serve as mate on board already; and he is positively certain of getting the crew together in three or four days' time. I am dying for a whiff of the sea, and so are you, or you are no sailor. The rigging is set up, the stores are

coming on board, and we shall bend the sails to-morrow or next day. I never was in such spirits in my life. Remember me to your wife, and tell her she will be doing me a favour if she will come at once, and order everything she wants in the lady's cabin. — Yours affectionately, A. A.'

"Under this was written in Midwinter's hand, — 'Remember what I told you. Write (it will break it to him more gently in that way), and beg him to accept your apologies, and to excuse you from sailing on the trial cruise.'

"I have written without a moment's loss of time. The sooner Manuel knows (which he is certain to do through Armadale) that the promise not to sail in the yacht is performed already, so far as I am concerned, the safer I shall feel.

"*October 27th.* — A letter from Armadale, — in answer to mine. He is full of ceremonious regret at the loss of my company on the cruise; and he politely hopes that Midwinter may yet induce me to alter my mind. Wait a little, till he finds that Midwinter won't sail with him either! . . . .

"*October 30th.* — Nothing new to record, until to-day. To-day, the change in our lives here has come at last!

"Armadale presented himself this morning, in his noisiest high spirits, to announce that the yacht was ready for sea, and to ask when Midwinter would be able to go on board. I told him to make the inquiry himself in Midwinter's room. He left me, with a last request that I would reconsider my refusal to sail with

him. I answered by a last apology for persisting in my resolution; and then took a chair alone at the window, to wait the event of the interview in the next room.

"My whole future depended, now, on what passed between Midwinter and his friend! Everything had gone smoothly up to this time. The one danger to dread was the danger of Midwinter's resolution, or rather of Midwinter's fatalism, giving way at the last moment. If he allowed himself to be persuaded into accompanying Armadale on the cruise, Manuel's exasperation against me would hesitate at nothing — he would remember that I had answered to him for Armadale's sailing from Naples alone; and he would be capable of exposing my whole past life to Midwinter before the vessel left the port. As I thought of this, and as the slow minutes followed each other, and nothing reached my ears but the hum of voices in the next room, my suspense became almost unendurable. It was vain to try and fix my attention on what was going on in the street. I sat looking mechanically out of the window, and seeing nothing.

"Suddenly — I can't say in how long, or how short a time — the hum of voices ceased; the door opened; and Armadale showed himself on the threshold, alone.

"'I wish you good-by,' he said roughly. 'And I hope when I am married, my wife may never cause Midwinter the disappointment that Midwinter's wife has caused *me!*'

"He gave me an angry look, and made me an angry bow — and, turning sharply, left the room.

"I saw the people in the street again! I saw the

calm sea, and the masts of the shipping in the harbour where the yacht lay! I could think, I could breathe freely once more! The words that saved me from Manuel — the words that might be Armadale's sentence of death — had been spoken. The yacht was to sail without Midwinter, as well as without Me!

"My first feeling of exultation was almost maddening. But it was the feeling of a moment only. My heart sank in me again, when I thought of Midwinter alone in the next room.

"I went out into the passage to listen, and heard nothing. I tapped gently at his door, and got no answer. I opened the door, and looked in. He was sitting at the table, with his face hidden in his hands. I looked at him in silence — and saw the glistening of the tears, as they trickled through his fingers.

"'Leave me,' he said, without moving his hands. 'I must get over it by myself.'

"I went back into the sitting-room. Who can understand women? — we don't even understand ourselves. His sending me away from him in that manner cut me to the heart. I don't believe the most harmless and most gentle woman living could have felt it more acutely than I felt it. And this, after what I have been doing! this, after what I was thinking of, the moment before I went into his room! Who can account for it? Nobody — I, least of all!

"Half an hour later, his door opened, and I heard him hurrying down the stairs. I ran out without waiting to think, and asked if I might go with him. He neither stopped nor answered. I went back to the window, and saw him pass, walking rapidly away, with his back turned on Naples and the sea.

"I can understand now, that he might not have heard me. At the time, I thought him inexcusably and brutally unkind to me. I put on my bonnet, in a frenzy of rage with him; I sent out for a carriage, and told the man to take me where he liked. He took me, as he took other strangers, to the Museum to see the statues and the pictures. I flounced from room to room, with my face in a flame, and the people all staring at me. I came to myself again, I don't know how. I returned to the carriage, and made the man drive me back in a violent hurry, I don't know why. I tossed off my cloak and bonnet, and sat down once more at the window. The sight of the sea cooled me. I forgot Midwinter, and thought of Armadale and his yacht. There was'nt a breath of wind; there wasn't a cloud in the sky — the wide waters of the Bay were as smooth as the surface of a glass.

"The sun sank; the short twilight came and went. I had some tea, and sat at the table thinking and dreaming over it. When I roused myself and went back to the window, the moon was up — but the quiet sea was as quiet as ever.

"I was still looking out, when I saw Midwinter in the street below, coming back. I was composed enough by this time to remember his habits, and to guess that he had been trying to relieve the oppression on his mind by one of his long solitary walks. When I heard him go into his own room, I was too prudent to disturb him again — I waited his pleasure, where I was.

"Before long I heard his window opened, and I saw him, from my window, step into the balcony, and after a look at the sea, hold up his hand to the air.

I was too stupid, for the moment, to remember that he had once been a sailor, and to know what this meant. I waited, and wondered what would happen next.

"He went in again; and, after an interval, came out once more, and held up his hand as before, to the air. This time, he waited, leaning on the balcony rail, and looking out steadily, with all his attention absorbed by the sea.

"For a long, long time he never moved. Then, on a sudden, I saw him start. The next moment, he sank on his knees, with his clasped hands resting on the balcony rail. 'God Almighty bless and keep you, Allan!' he said fervently. 'Good-by for ever!'

"I looked out to the sea. A soft steady breeze was blowing, and the rippled surface of the water was sparkling in the quiet moonlight. I looked again — and there passed slowly, between me and the track of the moon, a long black vessel with tall shadowy ghost-like sails, gliding smooth and noiseless through the water, like a snake.

"The wind had come fair, with the night; and Armadale's yacht had sailed on the trial cruise.

CHAPTER III.

The Diary broken off.

"*London, November 19th.* — I am alone again in the Great City; alone, for the first time, since our marriage. Nearly a week since, I started on my homeward journey; leaving Midwinter behind me at Turin.

"The days have been so full of events since the month began, and I have been so harassed, in mind

and body both, for the greater part of the time, that my Diary has been wretchedly neglected. A few notes, written in such hurry and confusion that I can hardly understand them myself, are all that I possess to remind me of what has happened, since the night when Armadale's yacht left Naples. Let me try if I can set this right, without more loss of time—let me try if I can recall the circumstances in their order as they have followed each other, from the beginning of the month.

"On the third of November — being then still at Naples — Midwinter received a hurried letter from Armadale, dated 'Messina.' 'The weather,' he said, 'had been lovely, and the yacht had made one of the quickest passages on record. The crew were rather a rough set to look at; but Captain Manuel, and his English mate,' (the latter described as 'the best of good fellows,') 'managed them admirably.' After this prosperous beginning, Armadale had arranged, as a matter of course, to prolong the cruise; and, at the sailing-master's suggestion, he had decided to visit some of the ports in the Adriatic, which the captain had described as full of character, and well worth seeing.

"A postscript followed, explaining that Armadale had written in a hurry to catch the steamer to Naples, and that he had opened his letter again, before sending it off, to add something that he had forgotten. On the day before the yacht sailed, he had been at the banker's to get 'a few hundreds in gold,' and he believed he had left his cigar-case there. It was an old friend of his, and he begged that Midwinter would oblige him by endeavouring to recover it, and keeping it for him till they met again.

"That was the substance of the letter.

"I thought over it carefully when Midwinter had left me alone again, after reading it. My idea was then (and is still) that Manuel had not persuaded Armadale to cruise in a sea like the Adriatic, so much less frequented by ships than the Mediterranean, for nothing. The terms, too, in which the trifling loss of the cigar-case was mentioned, struck me as being equally suggestive of what was coming. I concluded that Armadale's circular notes had not been transformed into those 'few hundreds in gold,' through any forethought or business-knowledge of his own. Manuel's influence, I suspected, had been exerted in this matter also — and once more not without reason. At intervals, through the wakeful night, these considerations came back again and again to me; and time after time they pointed obstinately (so far as my next movements were concerned) in one and the same way — the way back to England.

"How to get there, and especially how to get there unaccompanied by Midwinter, was more than I had wit enough to discover, that night. I tried, and tried, to meet the difficulty, and fell asleep exhausted towards the morning, without having met it.

"Some hours later, as soon as I was dressed, Midwinter came in, with news received by that morning's post from his employers in London. The proprietors of the newspaper had received from the editor so favourable a report of his correspondence from Naples, that they had determined on advancing him to a place of greater responsibility and greater emolument at Turin. His instructions were enclosed in the letter;

and he was requested to lose no time in leaving Naples for his new post.

"On hearing this, I relieved his mind, before he could put the question, of all anxiety about my willingness to remove. Turin had the great attraction, in my eyes, of being on the road to England. I assured him at once that I was ready to travel as soon as he pleased.

"He thanked me for suiting myself to his plans, with more of his old gentleness and kindness than I had seen in him for some time past. The good news from Armadale on the previous day seemed to have roused him a little from the dull despair in which he had been sunk since the sailing of the yacht. And now, the prospect of advancement in his profession, and, more than that, the prospect of leaving the fatal place in which the third Vision of the Dream had come true, had (as he owned himself) additionally cheered and relieved him. He asked, before he went away to make the arrangements for our journey, whether I expected to hear from my 'family' in England, and whether he should give instructions for the forwarding of my letters with his own to the *poste restante* at Turin. I instantly thanked him, and accepted the offer. His proposal had suggested to me, the moment he made it, that my fictitious 'family circumstances' might be turned to good account once more, as a reason for unexpectedly summoning me from Italy to England.

"On the ninth of the month we were installed at Turin.

"On the thirteenth, Midwinter — being then very busy — asked if I would save him a loss of time by

applying for any letters which might have followed us from Naples. I had been waiting for the opportunity he now offered me; and I determined to snatch at it, without allowing myself time to hesitate. There were no letters at the *poste restante* for either of us. But, when he put the question on my return, I told him that there had been a letter for me, with alarming news from 'home.' My 'mother' was dangerously ill; and I was entreated to lose no time in hurrying back to England to see her.

"It seems quite unaccountable — now that I am away from him — but it is none the less true, that I could not, even yet, tell him a downright premeditated falsehood, without a sense of shrinking and shame, which other people would think, and which I think myself, utterly inconsistent with such a character as mine. Inconsistent or not, I felt it. And what is stranger — perhaps, I ought to say, madder — still, if he had persisted in his first resolution to accompany me himself to England, rather than allow me to travel alone, I firmly believe I should have turned my back on temptation for the second time, and have lulled myself to rest once more in the old dream of living out my life happy and harmless in my husband's love.

"Am I deceiving myself in this? It doesn't matter — I daresay I am. Never mind what *might* have happened. What *did* happen is the only thing of any importance now.

"It ended in Midwinter's letting me persuade him that I was old enough to take care of myself on the journey to England, and that he owed it to the newspaper people, who had trusted their interests in his hands, not to leave Turin just as he was established

there. He didn't suffer at taking leave of me as he suffered when he saw the last of his friend. I saw that, and set down the anxiety he expressed that I should write to him, at its proper value. I have quite got over my weakness for him at last. No man who really loved me would have put what he owed to a pack of newspaper people before what he owed to his wife. I hate him for letting me convince him! I believe he was glad to get rid of me. I believe he has seen some woman whom he likes at Turin. Well, let him follow his new fancy, if he pleases! I shall be the widow of Mr. Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose, before long — and what will his likes or dislikes matter to me then?

"The events on the journey were not worth mentioning, and my arrival in London stands recorded already on the top of the new page.

"As for to-day, the one thing of any importance that I have done, since I got to the cheap and quiet hotel at which I am now staying, has been to send for the landlord, and ask him to help me to a sight of the back numbers of *The Times* newspaper. He has politely offered to accompany me himself to-morrow morning to some place in the City where all the papers are kept, as he calls it, in file. Till to-morrow, then, I must control my impatience for news of Armadale as well as I can. And so good-night to the pretty reflection of myself that appears in these pages!

"*November 20th.* — Not a word of news yet, either in the obituary column or in any other part of the paper. I looked carefully through each number in succession, dating from the day when Armadale's letter

was written at Messina, to this present 20th of the month — and I am certain, whatever may have happened, that nothing is known in England as yet. Patience! The newspaper is to meet me at the breakfast-table every morning till further notice — and any day now may show me what I most want to see.

"*November* 21*st.* — No news again. I wrote to Midwinter to-day, to keep up appearances.

"When the letter was done, I fell into wretchedly low spirits — I can't imagine why — and felt such a longing for a little company, that in despair of knowing where else to go, I actually went to Pimlico, on the chance that Mother Oldershaw might have returned to her old quarters.

"There were changes since I had seen the place during my former stay in London. Doctor Downward's side of the house was still empty. But the shop was being brightened up for the occupation of a milliner and dressmaker. The people, when I went in to make inquiries, were all strangers to me. They showed, however, no hesitation in giving me Mrs. Oldershaw's address, when I asked for it — from which I infer that the little 'difficulty' which forced her to be in hiding in August last, is at an end, so far as she is concerned. As for the doctor, the people at the shop either were, or pretended to be, quite unable to tell me what had become of him.

"I don't know whether it was the sight of the place at Pimlico that sickened me, or whether it was my own perversity, or what. But now that I had got Mrs. Oldershaw's address, I felt as if she was the very last person in the world that I wanted to see. I took a

cab, and told the man to drive to the street she lived in, and then told him to drive back to the hotel. I hardly know what is the matter with me — unless it is that I am getting more impatient every hour for information about Armadale. When will the future look a little less dark, I wonder? To-morrow is Saturday. Will to-morrow's newspaper lift the veil?

"*November 22nd.* — Saturday's newspaper *has* lifted the veil! Words are vain to express the panic of astonishment in which I write. I never once anticipated it — I can't believe it or realize it now it has happened. The winds and waves themselves have turned my accomplices! The yacht has foundered at sea, and every soul on board has perished!

"Here is the account cut out of this morning's newspaper: —

"'DISASTER AT SEA. — Intelligence has reached the Royal Yacht Squadron and the insurers, which leaves no reasonable doubt, we regret to say, of the total loss, on the fifth of the present month, of the yacht *Dorothea*, with every soul on board. The particulars are as follow: — At daylight, on the morning of the sixth, the Italian brig *Speranza*, bound from Venice to Marsala for orders, encountered some floating objects off Cape Spartivento (at the southernmost extremity of Italy) with attracted the curiosity of the people of the brig. The previous day had been marked by one of the most severe of the sudden and violent storms, peculiar to these southern seas, which has been remembered for years. The *Speranza* herself having been in danger while the gale lasted, the captain and crew concluded that they were on the traces of a wreck, and a boat was lowered for the purpose of examining the objects in the water. A hencoop, some broken spars, and fragments of shattered plank were the first evidences discovered of the terrible disaster that had happened. Some of the lighter articles of cabin furniture, wrenched and shattered, were found next. And, lasty, a memento of melancholy interest turned up, in the shape of a life-buoy, with a corked bottle attached to it. These latter objects, with the relics of cabin-furniture, were brought on board the *Speranza*. On the buoy the name of the vessel was painted as follows: — '*Dorothea*, R.Y.S.' (meaning Royal Yacht Squadron). The bottle, on being uncorked, contained a sheet of note-paper, on which the following lines were hurriedly

traced in pencil: — 'Off Cape Spartivento; two days out from Messina. Nov. 5th, 4 P.M.' (being the hour at which the log of the Italian brig showed the storm to have been at its height). 'Both our boats are stove in by the sea. The rudder is gone, and we have sprung a leak astern which is more than we can stop. The Lord help us all — we are sinking. (Signed) John Mitchenden, mate.' On reaching Marsala, the captain of the brig made his report to the British consul, and left the objects discovered in that gentleman's charge. Inquiry at Messina showed that the ill-fated vessel had arrived there from Naples. At the latter port it was ascertained that the *Dorothea* had been hired from the owner's agent, by an English gentleman, Mr. Armadale, of Thorpe-Ambrose, Norfolk. Whether Mr. Armadale had any friends on board with him has not been clearly discovered. But there is unhappily 'no doubt that the ill-fated gentleman himself sailed in the yacht from Naples, and that he was also on board of the vessel when she left Messina."

"Such is the story of the wreck, as the newspaper tells it in the plainest and fewest words. My head is in a whirl; my confusion is so great that I think of fifty different things, in trying to think of one. I must wait — a day more or less is of no consequence now — I must wait till I can face my new position, without feeling bewildered by it.

"*November 23rd, Eight in the Morning.* — I rose an hour ago, and saw my way clearly to the first step that I must take, under present circumstances.

"It is of the utmost importance to me to know what is doing at Thorpe-Ambrose; and it would be the height of rashness, while I am quite in the dark in this matter, to venture there myself. The only other alternative is to write to somebody on the spot for news; and the only person I can write to is — Bashwood.

"I have just finished the letter. It is headed 'private and confidential,' and signed Lydia Armadale.' There is nothing in it to compromise me, if the old fool is mortally offended by my treatment of him, and if he spitefully shows my letter to other people.

But I don't believe he will do this. A man at his age forgives a woman anything, if the woman only encourages him. I have requested him, as a personal favour, to keep our correspondence for the present strictly private. I have hinted that my married life with my deceased husband has not been a happy one; and that I feel the injudiciousness of having married a *young* man. In the postscript I go farther still, and venture boldly on these comforting words, — 'I can explain, dear Mr. Bashwood, what may have seemed false and deceitful in my conduct towards you, when you give me a personal opportunity.' If he was on the right side of sixty I should feel doubtful of results. But he is on the wrong side of sixty, and I believe he will give me my personal opportunity.

"*Ten o'clock.* — I have been looking over the copy of my marriage-certificate, with which I took care to provide myself on the wedding-day; and I have discovered, to my inexpressible dismay, an obstacle to my appearance in the character of Armadale's widow, which I now see for the first time.

"The description of Midwinter (under his own name) which the certificate presents, answers in every important particular, to what would have been the description of Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose, if I had really married him. 'Name and Surname' — Allan Armadale. 'Age' twenty-one, instead of twenty-two, which might easily pass for a mistake. 'Condition' — Bachelor. 'Rank or Profession' — Gentleman. 'Residence at the time of Marriage' — Frant's Hotel, Darleystreet. 'Father's Name and Surname' — Allan Armadale. 'Rank or Profession of Father' — Gentleman. Every

particular (except the year's difference in their two ages) which answers for the one, answers for the other. But, suppose when I produce my copy of the certificate, that some meddlesome lawyer insists on looking at the original register? Midwinter's writing is as different as possible from the writing of his dead friend. The hand in which he has written 'Allan Armadale' in the book, has not a chance of passing for the hand in which Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose was accustomed to sign his name.

"Can I move safely in the matter, with such a pitfall as I see here, open under my feet? How can I tell? Where can I find an experienced person to inform me? I must shut up my diary and think.

"*Seven o'clock.* — My prospects have changed again since I made my last entry. I have received a warning to be careful in the future, which I shall not neglect; and I have (I believe) succeeded in providing myself with the advice and assistance of which I stand in need.

"After vainly trying to think of some better person to apply to in the difficulty which embarrassed me, I made a virtue of necessity, and set forth to surprise Mrs. Oldershaw by a visit from her darling Lydia! It is almost needless to add that I determined to sound her carefully, and not to let any secret of importance out of my own possession.

"A sour and solemn old maid-servant admitted me into the house. When I asked for her mistress, I was reminded with the bitterest emphasis, that I had committed the impropriety of calling on a Sunday. Mrs. Oldershaw was at home, solely in consequence of being

too unwell to go to church! The servant thought it very unlikely that she would see me. I thought it highly probable, on the contrary, that she would honour me with an interview in her own interests, if I sent in my name as 'Miss Gwilt,' — and the event proved that I was right. After being kept waiting some minutes I was shown into the drawing-room.

"There sat mother Jezebel, with the air of a woman resting on the high-road to heaven, dressed in a slate-coloured gown, with grey mittens on her hands, a severely simple cap on her head, and a volume of sermons on her lap. She turned up the whites of her eyes devoutly at the sight of me, and the first words she said were — 'Oh, Lydia! Lydia! why are you not at church?'

"If I had been less anxious, the sudden presentation of Mrs. Oldershaw, in an entirely new character, might have amused me. But I was in no humour for laughing, and (my notes-of-hand being all paid), I was under no obligation to restrain my natural freedom of speech. 'Stuff and nonsense!' I said. 'Put your Sunday face in your pocket. I have got some news for you, since I last wrote from Thorpe-Ambrose.'

"The instant I mentioned 'Thorpe-Ambrose,' the whites of the old hypocrite's eyes showed themselves again, and she flatly refused to hear a word more from me on the subject of my proceedings in Norfolk. I insisted — but it was quite useless. Mother Oldershaw only shook her head and groaned, and informed me that her connection with the pomps and vanities of the world was at an end for ever. 'I have been born again, Lydia,' said the brazen old wretch, wiping her eyes. 'Nothing will induce me to return to the subject

of that wicked speculation of yours on the folly of a rich young man.'

"After hearing this, I should have left her on the spot, but for one consideration which delayed me a moment longer.

"It was easy to see, by this time, that the circumstances (whatever they might have been) which had obliged Mother Oldershaw to keep in hiding, on the occasion of my former visit to London, had been sufficiently serious to force her into giving up, or appearing to give up, her old business. And it was hardly less plain that she had found it to her advantage — everybody in England finds it to their advantage, in some way — to cover the outer side of her character carefully with a smooth varnish of Cant. This was, however, no business of mine; and I should have made these reflections outside, instead of inside the house, if my interests had not been involved in putting the sincerity of Mother Oldershaw's reformation to the test — so far as it affected her past connection with myself. At the time when she had fitted me out for our enterprise, I remembered signing a certain business-document which gave her a handsome pecuniary interest in my success, if I became Mrs. Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose. The chance of turning this mischievous morsel of paper to good account, in the capacity of a touchstone, was too tempting to be resisted. I asked my devout friend's permission to say one last word, before I left the house.

"'As you have no further interest in my wicked speculation at Thorpe-Ambrose,' I said, 'perhaps you will give me back the written paper that I signed,

when you were not quite such an exemplary person as you are now?'

"The shameless old hypocrite instantly shut her eyes and shuddered.

"'Does that mean Yes, or No?' I asked.

"'On moral and religious grounds, Lydia,' said Mrs. Oldershaw, 'it means No.'

"'On wicked and worldly grounds,' I rejoined, 'I beg to thank you for showing me your hand.'

"There could, indeed, be no doubt, now, about the object she really had in view. She would run no more risks and lend no more money — she would leave me to win or lose, single-handed. If I lost, she would not be compromised. If I won, she would produce the paper I had signed, and profit by it without remorse. In my present situation it was mere waste of time and words to prolong the matter by any useless recrimination on my side. I put the warning away privately in my memory for future use, and got up to go.

"At the moment when I left my chair, there was a sharp double knock at the street-door. Mrs. Oldershaw evidently recognized it. She rose in a violent hurry and rang the bell. 'I am too unwell to see anybody,' she said, when the servant appeared. 'Wait a moment, if you please,' she added, turning sharply on me, when the woman had left us to answer the door.

"It was small, very small, spitefulness on my part, I know — but the satisfaction of thwarting Mother Jezebel, even in a trifle, was not to be resisted. 'I can't wait,' I said; 'you reminded me just now that I ought to be at church.' Before she could answer, I was out of the room.

"As I put my foot on the first stair the street-door

was opened; and a man's voice inquired whether Mrs. Oldershaw was at home.

"I instantly recognized the voice. Doctor Downward!

The doctor repeated the servant's message in a tone which betrayed unmistakable irritation at finding himself admitted no farther than the door.

"'Your mistress is not well enough to see visitors? Give her that card,' said the doctor, 'and say I expect her, the next time I call, to be well enough to see *me*.'

"If his voice had not told me plainly that he felt in no friendly mood towards Mrs. Oldershaw, I daresay I should have let him go without claiming his acquaintance. But, as things were, I felt an impulse to speak to him or to anybody who had a grudge against Mother Jezebel. There was more of my small spitefulness in this, I suppose. Anyway, I slipped downstairs; and, following the doctor out quietly, overtook him in the street.

"I had recognized his voice, and I recognized his back as I walked behind him. But when I called him by his name, and when he turned round with a start and confronted me, I followed his example, and started on my side. The doctor's face was transformed into the face of a perfect stranger! His baldness had hidden itself under an artfully grizzled wig. He had allowed his whiskers to grow, and had dyed them to match his new head of hair. Hideous circular spectacles bestrode his nose in place of the neat double eyeglass that he used to carry in his hand; and a black neckerchief, surmounted by immense shirt-collars, appeared as the unworthy successor of the clerical white cravat of former times. Nothing remained of the man I once knew but

the comfortable plumpness of his figure, and the confidential courtesy and smoothness of his manner and his voice.

"'Charmed to see you again," said the doctor, looking about him a little anxiously, and producing his card-case in a very precipitate manner. 'But my dear Miss Gwilt, permit me to rectify a slight mistake on your part. Doctor Downward of Pimlico is dead and buried; and you will infinitely oblige me if you will never, on any consideration, mention him again!'

"I took the card he offered me, and discovered that I was now supposed to be speaking to 'Doctor Le Doux, of the Sanatorium, Fairweather Vale, Hampstead!'

"'You seem to have found it necessary,' I said, 'to change a great many things since I last saw you? Your name, your residence, your personal appearance —?'

"'And my branch of practice,' interposed the doctor. 'I have purchased of the original possessor (a person of feeble enterprise and no resources) a name, a diploma, and a partially completed sanatorium for the reception of nervous invalids. We are open already to the inspection of a few privileged friends — come and see us. Are you walking my way? Pray take my arm, and tell me to what happy chance I am indebted for the pleasure of seeing you again?'

"I told him the circumstances exactly as they had happened, and I added (with a view to making sure of his relations with his former ally at Pimlico) that I had been greatly surprised to hear Mrs. Oldershaw's door shut on such an old friend as himself. Cautious as he was, the doctor's manner of receiving my remark satis-

fied me at once that my suspicions of an estrangement were well founded. His smile vanished, and he settled his hideous spectacles irritably on the bridge of his nose.

"'Pardon me if I leave you to draw your own conclusions,' he said. 'The subject of Mrs. Oldershaw is, I regret to say, far from agreeable to me under existing circumstances. A business difficulty connected with our late partnership at Pimlico, entirely without interest for a young and brilliant woman like yourself. Tell me your news! Have you left your situation at Thorpe-Ambrose? Are you residing in London? Is there anything, professional or otherwise, that I can do for you?'

"That last question was a more important one tha he supposed. Before I answered it, I felt the necessity of parting company with him and of getting a little time to think.

"'You have kindly asked me, doctor, to pay you a visit,' I said. 'In your quiet house at Hampstead, I may possibly have something to say to you which I can't say in this noisy street. When are you at home at the Sanatorium? Should I find you there later in the day?'

"The doctor assured me that he was then on his way back, and begged that I would name my own hour. I said, 'Towards the afternoon;' and, pleading an engagement, hailed the first omnibus that passed us. 'Don't forget the address,' said the doctor, as he handed me in. 'I have got your card,' I answered — and so we parted.

"I returned to the hotel, and went up into my room, and thought over it very anxiously.

"The serious obstacle of the signature on the marriage register still stood in my way as unmanageably as ever. All hope of getting assistance from Mrs. Oldershaw was at an end. I could only regard her henceforth as an enemy hidden in the dark — the enemy, beyond all doubt now, who had had me followed and watched when I was last in London. To what other counsellor could I turn for the advice which my unlucky ignorance of law and business obliged me to seek from some one more experienced than myself? Could I go to the lawyer whom I consulted when I was about to marry Midwinter in my maiden name? Impossible! To say nothing of his cold reception of me when I had last seen him, the advice I wanted this time, related (disguise the facts as I might) to the commission of a Fraud — a fraud of the sort that no prosperous lawyer would consent to assist, if he had a character to lose. Was there any other competent person I could think of? There was one, and one only — the doctor who had died at Pimlico, and had revived again at Hampstead.

"I knew him to be entirely without scruples; to have the business experience that I wanted myself; and to be as cunning, as clever, and as far-seeing a man as could be found in all London. Beyond this, I had made two important discoveries in connection with him that morning. In the first place, he was on bad terms with Mrs. Oldershaw, — which would protect me from all danger of the two leaguing together against me, if I trusted him. In the second place, circumstances still obliged him to keep his identity carefully disguised, — which gave me a hold over him in no

respect inferior to any hold that *I* might give him over *me*. In every way he was the right man, the only man, for my purpose; and yet I hesitated at going to him — hesitated for a full hour and more, without knowing why!

"It was two o'clock before I finally decided on paying the doctor a visit. Having, after this, occupied nearly another hour in determining to a hair's breadth how far I should take him into my confidence, I sent for a cab at last, and set off towards three in the afternoon for Hampstead.

"I found the Sanatorium with some little difficulty.

"Fairweather Vale proved to be a new neighbourhood, situated below the high ground of Hampstead, on the southern side. The day was overcast, and the place looked very dreary. We approached it by a new road running between trees, which might once have been the park-avenue of a country house. At the end we came upon a wilderness of open ground, with half-finished villas dotted about, and a hideous litter of boards, wheelbarrows, and building materials of all sorts scattered in every direction. At one corner of this scene of desolation stood a great overgrown dismal house, plastered with drab-coloured stucco, and surrounded by a naked unfinished garden, without a shrub or a flower in it — frightful to behold. On the open iron gate that led into this enclosure was a new brass plate, with 'Sanatorium' inscribed on it in great black letters. The bell, when the cabman rang it, pealed through the empty house like a knell; and the pallid withered old manservant in black, who answered the door, looked as if he had stepped up out of his grave

to perform that service. He let out on me a smell of damp plaster and new varnish; and he let in with me a chilling draught of the damp November air. I didn't notice it at the time — but writing of it now, I remember that I shivered as I crossed the threshold.

"I gave my name to the servant as 'Mrs. Armadale,' and was shown into the waiting-room. The very fire itself was dying of damp in the grate. The only books on the table were the doctor's Works, in sober drab covers; and the only object that ornamented the walls was the foreign Diploma (handsomely framed and glazed), of which the doctor had possessed himself by purchase, along with the foreign name.

"After a moment or two, the proprietor of the Sanatorium came in and held up his hands in cheerful astonishment at the sight of me.

"'I hadn't an idea who ""Mrs. Armadale"" was!' he said. "My dear lady, have *you* changed your name, too? How sly of you not to tell me when we met this morning! Come into my private snuggery — I can't think of keeping an old and dear friend like you in the patients' waiting-room.'

"The doctor's private snuggery was at the back of the house, looking out on fields and trees, doomed but not yet destroyed by the builder. Horrible objects in brass and leather and glass, twisted and turned as if they were sentient things writhing in agonies of pain, filled up one end of the room. A great book-case with glass doors extended over the whole of the opposite wall, and exhibited on its shelves long rows of glass jars, in which shapeless dead creatures of a dull white colour floated in yellow liquid. Above the fireplace hung a collection of photographic portraits of men and

women, enclosed in two large frames hanging side by side with a space between them. The left-hand frame illustrated the effects of nervous suffering as seen in the face; the right-hand frame exhibited the ravages of insanity from the same point of view; while the space between was occupied by an elegantly-illuminated scroll, bearing inscribed on it the time-honoured motto, 'Prevention is better than Cure.'

"'Here I am, with my galvanic apparatus, and my preserved specimens, and all the rest of it,' said the doctor, placing me in a chair by the fireside. 'And there is my System mutely addressing you just above your head, under a form of exposition which I venture to describe as frankness itself. This is no madhouse, my dear lady. Let other men treat insanity, if they like — *I* stop it! No patients in the house as yet. But we live in an age when nervous derangement (parent of insanity) is steadily on the increase; and in due time the sufferers will come. I can wait as Harvey waited, as Jenner waited. And now, do put your feet up on the fender, and tell me about yourself. You are married, of course? And what a pretty name! Accept my best and most heartfelt congratulations. You have the two greatest blessings that can fall to a woman's lot; the two capital H's, as I call them — Husband and Home.'

"I interrupted the genial flow of the doctor's congratulations at the first opportunity.

"'I am married; but the circumstances are by no means of the ordinary kind,' I said seriously. "My present position includes none of the blessings that are usually supposed to fall to a woman's lot. I am already in a situation of very serious difficulty — and

before long I may be in a situation of very serious danger as well."

"The doctor drew his chair a little nearer to me, and fell at once into his old professional manner and his old confidential tone.

"'If you wish to consult me,' he said softly, 'you know that I have kept some dangerous secrets in my time, and you also know that I possess two valuable qualities as an adviser. I am not easily shocked; and I can be implicitly trusted.'

"I hesitated even now, at the eleventh hour, sitting alone with him in his own room. It was so strange to me to be trusting to anybody but myself! And yet, how could I help trusting another person, in a difficulty which turned on a matter of law?

"'Just as you please, you know,' added the doctor, 'I never invite confidences. I merely receive them.'

"There was no help for it; I had come there not to hesitate, but to speak. I risked it, and spoke.

"'The matter on which I wish to consult you,' I said, 'is not (as you seem to think) within your experience as a professional man. But I believe you may be of assistance to me, if I trust myself to your larger experience as a man of the world. I warn you, beforehand, that I shall certainly surprise and possibly alarm you before I have done.'

"With that preface, I entered on my story, telling him what I had settled to tell him — and no more.

"I made no secret, at the outset, of my intention to personate Armadale's widow; and I mentioned without reserve (knowing that the doctor could go to the office and examine the will for himself) the handsome income that would be settled on me in the event of my

success. Some of the circumstances that followed next in succession, I thought it desirable to alter or conceal. I showed him the newspaper account of the loss of the yacht — but I said nothing about events at Naples. I informed him of the exact similarity of the two names; leaving him to imagine that it was accidental. I told him, as an important element in the matter, that my husband had kept his real name a profound secret from everybody but myself; but (to prevent any communication between them) I carefully concealed from the doctor what the assumed name under which Midwinter had lived all his life really was. I acknowledged that I had left my husband behind me on the Continent; but when the doctor put the question, I allowed him to conclude — I couldn't with all my resolution tell him positively! — that Midwinter knew of the contemplated Fraud, and that he was staying away purposely so as not to compromise me by his presence. This difficulty smoothed over — or, as I feel it now, this baseness committed, — I reverted to myself, and came back again to the truth. One after another, I mentioned all the circumstances connected with my private marriage, and with the movements of Armadale and Midwinter, which rendered any discovery of the false personation (through the evidence of other people) a downright impossibility. 'So much,' I said, in conclusion, 'for the object in view. The next thing is to tell you plainly of a very serious obstacle that stands in my way.'

"The doctor, who had listened thus far without interrupting me, begged permission here to say a few words on his side before I went on.

"The 'few words' proved to be all questions —

clever, searching, suspicious questions, — which I was, however, able to answer with little or no reserve, for they related, in almost every instance, to the circumstances under which I had been married, and to the chances for and against my lawful husband if he chose to assert his claim to me at any future time.

"My replies informed the doctor, in the first place, that I had so managed matters at Thorpe-Ambrose as to produce a general impression that Armadale intended to marry me; in the second place, that my husband's early life had not been of a kind to exhibit him favourably in the eyes of the world; in the third place, that we had been married without any witnesses present who knew us, at a large parish church in which two other couples had been married the same morning, to say nothing of the dozens on dozens of other couples (confusing all remembrance of us in the minds of the officiating people) who had been married since. When I had put the doctor in possession of these facts — and when he had further ascertained that Midwinter and I had gone abroad among strangers immediately after leaving the church; and that the men employed on board the yacht in which Armadale had sailed from Somersetshire (before my marriage) were now away in ships voyaging to the other end of the world — his confidence in my prospects showed itself plainly in his face. 'So far as I can see,' he said, 'your husband's claim to you (after you have stepped into the place of the dead Mr. Armadale's widow) would rest on nothing but his own bare assertion. And *that* I think you may safely set at defiance. Excuse my apparent distrust of the gentleman. But there might be a misunderstanding between you in the future, and it is highly

desirable to ascertain beforehand exactly what he could or could not do under those circumstances. And now that we have done with the main obstacle that *I* see in the way of your success, let us by all means come to the obstacle that *you* see next!'

"I was willing enough to come to it. The tone in which he spoke of Midwinter, though I myself was responsible for it, jarred on me horribly, and roused for the moment some of the old folly of feeling which I fancied I had laid asleep for ever. I rushed at the chance of changing the subject, and mentioned the discrepancy in the register between the hand in which Midwinter had signed the name of Allan Armadale, and the hand in which Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose had been accustomed to write his name, with an eagerness which it quite diverted the doctor to see.

"'Is *that* all?' he asked, to my infinite surprise and relief, when I had done. 'My dear lady, pray set your mind at ease! If the late Mr. Armadale's lawyers want a proof of your marriage, they won't go to the church-register for it, I can promise you!'

"'What!' I exclaimed in astonishment; 'do you mean to say that the entry in the register is not a proof of my marriage?'

"'It is a proof,' said the doctor, 'that you have been married to somebody. But it is no proof that you have been married to Mr. Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose. Jack Nokes or Tom Styles (excuse the homeliness of the illustration!) might have got the Licence, and gone to the church to be married to you under Mr. Armadale's name — and the register (how could it do otherwise?) must in that case have innocently assisted the deception. I see I surprise you.

My dear madam, when you opened this interesting business you surprised *me* — I may own it now — by laying so much stress on the curious similarity between the two names. You might have entered on the very daring and romantic enterprise in which you are now engaged, without necessarily marrying your present husband. Any other man would have done just as well, provided he was willing to take Mr. Armadale's name for the purpose.'

"I felt my temper going at this. 'Any other man would *not* have done just as well,' I rejoined instantly. 'But for the similarity of the names, I should never have thought of the enterprise at all.'

"The doctor admitted that he had spoken too hastily. 'That personal view of the subject had, I confess, escaped me,' he said. 'However, let us get back to the matter in hand. In the course of what I may term an adventurous medical life, I have been brought more than once into contact with the gentlemen of the law, and have had opportunities of observing their proceedings in cases of, let us say, Domestic Jurisprudence. I am quite sure I am correct in informing you that the proof which will be required by Mr. Armadale's representatives will be the evidence of a witness present at the marriage, who can speak to the identity of the bride and bridegroom from his own personal knowledge.'

"'But I have already told you,' I said, 'that there was no such person present.'

"'Precisely,' rejoined the doctor. 'In that case, what you now want, before you can safely stir a step in the matter, is — if you will pardon me the expression — a ready-made witness, possessed of rare moral

and personal resources, who can be trusted to assume the necessary character, and to make the necessary Declaration before a magistrate. Do you know of any such person?' asked the doctor, throwing himself back in his chair, and looking at me with the utmost innocence.

"'I only know You,' I said.

"The doctor laughed softly. 'So like a woman!' he remarked, with the most exasperating good-humour. 'The moment she sees her object, she dashes at it headlong the nearest way. Oh, the sex! the sex!'

"'Never mind the sex!' I broke out impatiently. 'I want a serious answer — Yes or No?'

"The doctor rose, and waved his hand with great gravity and dignity all round the room. 'You see this vast establishment,' he began; 'you can possibly estimate to some extent the immense stake I have in its prosperity and success. Your excellent natural sense will tell you that the Principal of this Sanatorium must be a man of the most unblemished character ——'

"'Why waste so many words,' I said, 'when one word will do? You mean No!'

"The Principal of the Sanatorium suddenly relapsed into the character of my confidential friend.

"'My dear lady,' he said, 'it isn't Yes, and it isn't No, at a moment's notice. Give me till to-morrow afternoon. By that time, I engage to be ready to do one of two things — either to withdraw myself from this business at once, or to go into it with you heart and soul. Do you agree to that? Very good — we may drop the subject then till to-morrow. Where can I call on you when I have decided what to do?'

"There was no objection to my trusting him with

my address at the hotel. I had taken care to present myself there as 'Mrs. Armadale;' and I had given Midwinter an address at the neighbouring post-office to write to, when he answered my letters. We settled the hour at which the doctor was to call on me; and, that matter arranged, I rose to go, resisting all offers of refreshment, and all proposals to show me over the house. His smooth persistence in keeping up appearances after we had thoroughly understood each other, disgusted me. I got away from him as soon as I could, and came back to my diary and my own room.

"We shall see how it ends to-morrow. My own idea is that my confidential friend will say Yes.

"*November 24th.* — The doctor has said Yes, as I supposed — but on terms which I never anticipated. The condition on which I have secured his services amounts to nothing less than the payment to him, on my stepping into the place of Armadale's widow, of half my first year's income — in other words, six hundred pounds!

"I protested against this extortionate demand in every way I could think of. All to no purpose. The doctor met me with the most engaging frankness. Nothing, he said, but the accidental embarrassment of his position at the present time would have induced him to mix himself up in the matter at all. He would honestly confess that he had exhausted his own resources, and the resources of other persons whom he described as his 'backers,' in the purchase and completion of the Sanatorium. Under those circumstances, six hundred pounds in prospect *was* an object to him. For that sum he would run the serious risk of advising

and assisting me. Not a farthing less would tempt him — and there he left it, with his best and friendliest wishes, in my hands!

"It ended in the only way in which it could end. I had no choice but to accept the terms, and to let the doctor settle things on the spot as he pleased. The arrangement once made between us, I must do him the justice to say that he showed no disposition to let the grass grow under his feet. He called briskly for pen, ink, and paper, and suggested opening the campaign at Thorpe-Ambrose by to-night's post.

"We agreed on a form of letter which I wrote, and which he copied on the spot. I entered into no particulars at starting. I simply asserted that I was the widow of the deceased Mr. Armadale; that I had been privately married to him; that I had returned to England on his sailing in the yacht from Naples; and that I begged to enclose a copy of my marriage-certificate, as a matter of form with which I presumed it was customary to comply. The letter was addressed to 'The representatives of the late Allan Armadale, Esq., Thorpe-Ambrose, Norfolk.' And the doctor himself carried it away, and put it in the post.

"I am not so excited and so impatient for results as I expected to be, now that the first step is taken. The thought of Midwinter haunts me like a ghost. I have been writing to him again — as before, to keep up appearances. It will be my last letter, I think. My courage feels shaken, my spirits get depressed, when my thoughts go back to Turin. I am no more capable of facing the consideration of Midwinter at this moment than I was in the bygone time. The day of reckoning with him, once distant and doubtful, is a

day that may come to me now, I know not how soon. And here I am, trusting myself blindly to the chapter of Accidents still!

"*November 25th.* — At two o'clock to-day the doctor called again by appointment. He has been to his lawyers (of course without taking them into our confidence) to put the case simply of proving my marriage. The result confirms what he has already told me. The pivot on which the whole matter will turn, if my claim is disputed, will be the question of identity; and it may be necessary for the witness to make his Declaration in the magistrates' presence before the week it out.

"In this position of affairs, the doctor thinks it important that we should be within easy reach of each other, and proposes to find a quiet lodging for me in his neighbourhood. I am quite willing to go anywhere — for, among the other strange fancies that have got possession of me, I have an idea that I shall feel more completely lost to Midwinter if I move out of the neighbourhood in which his letters are addressed to me. I was awake and thinking of him again last night. This morning I have finally decided to write to him no more.

"After staying half an hour, the doctor left me — having first inquired whether I would like to accompany him to Hampstead to look for lodgings. I informed him that I had some business of my own which would keep me in London. He inquired what the business was. 'You will see,' I said, 'to-morrow or next day.'

"I had a moment's nervous trembling when I was by myself again. My business in London, besides

being a serious business in a woman's eyes, took my mind back to Midwinter in spite of me. The prospect of removing to my new lodging had reminded me of the necessity of dressing in my new character. The time had come now for getting *my widow's weeds.*

"My first proceeding, after putting my bonnet on, was to provide myself with money. I got what I wanted to fit me out for the character of Armadale's widow, by nothing less than the sale of Armadale's own present to me on my marriage — the ruby ring! It proved to be a more valuable jewel than I had supposed. I am likely to be spared all money anxieties for some time to come.

"On leaving the jeweller's, I went to the great mourning shop in Regent Street. In four and twenty hours (if I can give them no more) they have engaged to dress me in my widow's costume from head to foot. I had another feverish moment when I left the shop; and, by way of further excitement on this agitating day, I found a surprise in store for me on my return to the hotel. An elderly gentleman was announced to be waiting to see me. I opened my sitting-room door — and there was old Bashwood!

"He had got my letter that morning, and had started for London by the next train to answer it in person. I had expected a great deal from him, but I had certainly not expected *that.* It flattered me. For the moment, I declare it flattered me!

"I pass over the wretched old creature's raptures and reproaches, and groans and tears, and weary long prosings about the lonely months he had passed at Thorpe-Ambrose, brooding over my desertion of him. He was quite eloquent at times — but I don't want his

eloquence here. It is needless to say that I put myself right with him, and consulted his feelings before I asked him for his news. What a blessing a woman's vanity is sometimes! I almost forgot my risks and responsibilities, in my anxiety to be charming. For a minute or two, I felt a warm little flutter of triumph. And it *was* a triumph — even with an old man! In a quarter of an hour, I had him smirking and smiling, hanging on my lightest words in an ecstasy, and answering all the questions I put to him, like a good little child.

"Here is his account of affairs at Thorpe-Ambrose, as I gently extracted it from him bit by bit: —

"In the first place, the news of Armadale's death has reached Miss Milroy. It has so completely overwhelmed her that her father has been compelled to remove her from the school. She is back at the cottage, and the doctor is in daily attendance. Do I pity her? Yes! I pity her exactly as much as she once pitied me!

"In the next place, the state of affairs at the great house, which I expected to find some difficulty in comprehending, turns out to be quite intelligible, and certainly not discouraging so far. Only yesterday, the lawyers on both sides came to an understanding. Mr. Darch (the family solicitor of the Blanchards, and Armadale's bitter enemy in past times) represents the interests of Miss Blanchard, who (in the absence of any male heir) is next heir to the estate, and who has, it appears, been in London for some time past. Mr. Smart, of Norwich (originally employed to overlook Bashwood), represents the deceased Armadale. And this is what the two lawyers have settled between them.

"Mr. Darch, acting for Miss Blanchard, has claimed

the possession of the estate and the right of receiving the rents at the Christmas audit, in her name. Mr. Smart, on his side, has admitted that there is great weight in the family solicitor's application. He cannot see his way, as things are now, to contesting the question of Armadale's death, and he will consent to offer no resistance to the application, if Mr. Darch will consent, on his side, to assume the responsibility of taking possession in Miss Blanchard's name. This Mr. Darch has already done; and the estate is now virtually in Miss Blanchard's possession.

"One result of this course of proceeding will be (as Bashwood thinks) to put Mr. Darch in the position of the person who really decides on my claim to the widow's place and the widow's money. The income being charged on the estate, it must come out of Miss Blanchard's pocket; and the question of paying it would appear therefore to be a question for Miss Blanchard's lawyer. To-morrow will probably decide whether this view is the right one — for my letter to Armadale's representatives will have been delivered at the great house this morning.

"So much for what old Bashwood had to tell me. Having recovered my influence over him, and possessed myself of all his information so far, the next thing to consider was the right use to turn him to in the future. He was entirely at my disposal, for his place at the steward's office has been already taken by Miss Blanchard's man of business, and he pleaded hard to be allowed to stay and serve my interests in London. There would not have been the least danger in letting him stay, for I had, as a matter of course, left him undisturbed in his conviction that I really am the

widow of Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose. But with the doctor's resources at my command, I wanted no assistance of any sort in London; and it occurred to me that I might make Bashwood more useful by sending him back to Norfolk to watch events there in my interests.

"He looked sorely disappointed (having had an eye evidently to paying his court to me in my widowed condition!) when I told him of the conclusion at which I had arrived. But a few words of persuasion, and a modest hint that he might cherish hopes in the future if he served me obediently in the present, did wonders in reconciling him to the necessity of meeting my wishes. He asked helplessly for 'instructions' when it was time for him to leave me and travel back by the evening train. I could give him none, for I had no idea as yet of what the legal people might or might not do. 'But suppose something happens,' he persisted, 'that I don't understand, what am I to do, so far away from you?' I could only give him one answer. 'Do nothing,' I said. 'Whatever it is, hold your tongue about it, and write, or come up to London immediately to consult me.' With those parting directions, and with an understanding that we were to correspond regularly, I let him kiss my hand, and sent him off to the train.

"Now that I am alone again, and able to think calmly of the interview between me and my elderly admirer, I find myself recalling a certain change in old Bashwood's manner which puzzled me at the time, and which puzzles me still.

"Even in his first moments of agitation at seeing me, I thought that his eyes rested on my face with a new kind of interest while I was speaking to him. Be-

sides this, he dropped a word or two afterwards, in telling me of his lonely life at Thorpe-Ambrose, which seemed to imply that he had been sustained in his solitude by a feeling of confidence about his future relations with me when we next met. If he had been a younger and a bolder man (and if any such discovery had been possible), I should almost have suspected him of having found out something about my past life which had made him privately confident of controlling me, if I showed any disposition to deceive and desert him again. But such an idea as this in connection with old Bashwood is simply absurd. Perhaps I am over-excited by the suspense and anxiety of my present position? Perhaps the merest fancies and suspicions are leading me astray? Let this be as it may, I have at any rate more serious subjects than the subject of old Bashwood to occupy me now. To-morrow's post may tell me what Armadale's representatives think of the claim of Armadale's widow.

"*November 26th.* — The answer has arrived this morning, in the form (as Bashwood supposed) of a letter from Mr. Darch. The crabbed old lawyer acknowledges my letter in three lines. Before he takes any steps, or expresses any opinion on the subject, he wants evidence of identity as well as the evidence of the certificate; and he ventures to suggest that it may be desirable, before we go any further, to refer him to my legal advisers.

"*Two o'clock.*—The doctor called shortly after twelve to say that he had found a lodging for me within twenty minutes' walk of the Sanatorium. In return for his news, I showed him Mr. Darch's letter. He took it

away at once to his lawyers, and came back with the necessary information for my guidance. I have answered Mr. Darch by sending him the address of my legal advisers — otherwise, the doctor's lawyers — without making any comment on the desire that he has expressed for additional evidence of the marriage. This is all that can be done to-day. To-morrow will bring with it events of greater interest — for to-morrow the doctor is to make his Declaration before the magistrate, and to-morrow I am to move to my new lodging in my widow's weeds.

"*November 27th.* — *Fairweather Vale Villas.* — The Declaration has been made, with all the necessary formalities. And I have taken possession, in my widow's costume, of my new rooms.

"I ought to be excited by the opening of this new act in the drama, and by the venturesome part that I am playing in it myself. Strange to say, I am quiet and depressed. The thought of Midwinter has followed me to my new abode, and is pressing on me heavily at this moment. I have no fear of any accident happening, in the interval that must still pass before I step publicly into the place of Armadale's widow. But when that time comes, and when Midwinter finds me (as sooner or later find me he must!) figuring in my false character, and settled in the position that I have usurped — *then*, I ask myself, What will happen? The answer still comes as it first came to me this morning, when I put on my widow's dress. Now, as then, the presentiment is fixed in my mind that he will kill me. If it was not too late to draw back —— Absurd! I shall shut up my journal.

"*November 28th.* — The lawyers have heard from Mr. Darch, and have sent him the Declaration by return of post.

"When the doctor brought me this news, I asked him whether his lawyers were aware of my present address; and, finding that he had not yet mentioned it to them, I begged that he would continue to keep it a secret for the future. The doctor laughed. 'Are you afraid of Mr. Darch's stealing a march on us, and coming to attack you personally?' he asked. I accepted the imputation, as the easiest way of making him comply with my request. 'Yes,' I said, 'I am afraid of Mr. Darch.'

"My spirits have risen since the doctor left me. There is a pleasant sensation of security in feeling that no strangers are in possession of my address. I am easy enough in my mind to-day to notice how wonderfully well I look in my widow's weeds, and to make myself agreeable to the people of the house.

"Midwinter disturbed me a little again last night; but I have got over the ghastly delusion which possessed me yesterday. I know better now than to dread violence from him when he discovers what I have done. And there is still less fear of his stooping to assert his claim to a woman who has practised on him such a deception as mine. The one serious trial that I shall be put to when the day of reckoning comes, will be the trial of preserving my false character in his presence. I shall be safe in his loathing and contempt for me, after that. On the day when I have denied him to his face, I shall have seen the last of him for ever.

"Shall I be able to deny him to his face? Shall I be able to look at him and speak to him as if he had

never been more to me than a friend? How do I know till the time comes? Was there ever such an infatuated fool as I am, to be writing of him at all, when writing only encourages me to think of him? I will make a new resolution. From this time forth, his name shall appear no more in these pages.

"*Monday, December 1st.* — The last month of the worn-out old year eighteen hundred and fifty-one! If I allowed myself to look back, what a miserable year I should see added to all the other miserable years that are gone! But I have made my resolution to look forward only, and I mean to keep it.

"I have nothing to record of the last two days, except that on the twenty-ninth I remembered Bashwood, and wrote to tell him of my new address. This morning the lawyers heard again from Mr. Darch. He acknowledges the receipt of the Declaration, but postpones stating the decision at which he has arrived until he has communicated with the trustees under the late Mr. Blanchard's will, and has received his final instructions from his client, Miss Blanchard. The doctor's lawyers declare that this last letter is a mere device for gaining time — with what object they are of course not in a position to guess. The doctor himself says, facetiously, it is the usual lawyer's object of making a long bill. My own idea is that Mr. Darch has his suspicions of something wrong, and that his purpose in trying to gain time ——

* * * * *

"*Ten, at night.* — I had written as far as that last unfinished sentence (towards four in the afternoon) when I was startled by hearing a cab drive up to the

door. I went to the window, and got there just in time to see old Bashwood getting out with an activity of which I should never have supposed him capable. So little did I anticipate the tremendous discovery that was going to burst on me in another minute, that I turned to the glass, and wondered what the susceptible old gentleman would say to me in my widow's cap.

"The instant he entered the room, I saw that some serious disaster had happened. His eyes were wild, his wig was awry. He approached me with a strange mixture of eagerness and dismay. 'I've done as you told me,' he whispered breathlessly. 'I've held my tongue about it, and come straight to *you!*' He caught me by the hand before I could speak, with a boldness quite new in my experience of him? 'Oh, how can I break it to you!' he burst out. 'I'm beside myself when I think of it!'

"'When you *can* speak,' I said, putting him into a chair, 'speak out. I see in your face that you bring me news I don't look for from Thorpe-Ambrose.'

"He put his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat, and drew out a letter. He looked at the letter, and looked at me. 'New-new-news you don't look for,' he stammered; 'but not from Thorpe-Ambrose!'

"'Not from Thorpe-Ambrose!'

"'No. From the sea!'

"The first dawning of the truth broke on me at those words. I couldn't speak — I could only hold out my hand to him for the letter.

"He still shrank from giving it to me. 'I daren't! I daren't!' he said to himself vacantly. 'The shock of it might be the death of her.'

"I snatched the letter from him. One glance at

the writing on the address was enough. My hands fell on my lap, with the letter fast held in them. I sat petrified, without moving, without speaking, without hearing a word of what Bashwood was saying to me, and slowly realized the terrible truth. The man whose widow I had claimed to be, was a living man to confront me! In vain I had mixed the drink at Naples — in vain I had betrayed him into Manuel's hands. Twice I had set the deadly snare for him, and twice Armadale had escaped me!

"I came to my sense of outward things again, and found Bashwood on his knees at my feet, crying.

"'You look angry,' he murmured helplessly. 'Are you angry with *me?* Oh, if you only knew what hopes I had when we last saw each other, and how cruelly that letter has dashed them all to the ground!'

"I put the miserable old creature back from me — but very gently. 'Hush!' I said. 'Don't distress me now. I want composure — I want to read the letter.'

"He went away submissively to the other end of the room. As soon as my eye was off him, I heard him say to himself, with impotent malignity, 'If the sea had been of my mind, the sea would have drowned him!'

"One by one, I slowly opened the folds of the letter; feeling, while I did so, the strangest incapability of fixing my attention on the very lines that I was burning to read. But why dwell any longer on sensations which I can't describe? It will be more to the purpose if I place the letter itself, for future reference, on this page of my journal.

"Fiume, Illyria, November 21st, 1851.

"MR. BASHWOOD,

"THE address I date from will surprise you — and you will be more surprised still when you hear how it is that I come to write to you from a port on the Adriatic Sea.

"I have been the victim of a rascally attempt at robbery and murder. The robbery has succeeded; and it is only through the mercy of God that the murder did not succeed too.

"I hired a yacht rather more than a month ago at Naples; and sailed (I am glad to think now) without any friend with me, for Messina. From Messina I went for a cruise in the Adriatic. Two days out, we were caught in a storm. Storms get up in a hurry, and go down in a hurry, in those parts. The vessel behaved nobly — I declare I feel the tears in my eyes now, when I think of her at the bottom of the sea! Towards sunset it began to moderate; and by midnight, except for a long smooth swell, the sea was as quiet as need be. I went below, a little tired (having helped in working the yacht while the gale lasted), and fell asleep in five minutes. About two hours after, I was woke by something falling into my cabin through a chink of the ventilator in the upper part of the door. I jumped up, and found a bit of paper with a key wrapped in it, and with writing on the inner side, in a hand which it was not very easy to read.

"Up to this time I had not had the ghost of a suspicion that I was alone at sea with a gang of murderous vagabonds (excepting one only) who would stick at nothing. I had got on very well with my

sailing-master (the worst scoundrel of the lot), and better still with his English mate. The sailors being all foreigners, I had very little to say to. They did their work, and no quarrels and nothing unpleasant happened. If anybody had told me, before I went to bed on the night after the storm, that the sailing-master and the crew and the mate (who had been no better than the rest of them at starting) were all in a conspiracy to rob me of the money I had on board, and then to drown me in my own vessel afterwards, I should have laughed in his face. Just remember that; and then fancy for yourself (for I'm sure I can't tell you) what I must have thought when I opened the paper round the key, and read what I now copy (from the mate's writing) as follows: —

"'Sir, — Stay in your bed till you hear a boat shove off from the starboard side — or you are a dead man. Your money is stolen; and in five minutes' time the yacht will be scuttled, and the cabin-hatch will be nailed down on you. Dead men tell no tales — and the sailing-master's notion is to leave proofs afloat that the vessel has foundered with all on board. It was his doing to begin with, and we were all in it. I can't find it in my heart not to give you a chance for your life. It's a bad chance, but I can do no more. I should be murdered myself if I didn't seem to go with the rest. The key of your cabin-door is thrown back to you, inside this. Don't be alarmed when you hear the hammer above. I shall do it, and I shall have short nails in my hand as well as long, and use the short ones only. Wait till you hear the boat with all of us shove off, and then prize up the cabin-hatch with your back. The vessel will float a quarter of an hour after the holes are bored in her. Slip into the sea on the port side, and keep the vessel between you and the boat. You will find plenty of loose lumber, wrenched away on purpose, drifting about to hold on by. It's a fine night and a smooth sea, and there's a chance that a ship may pick you up while there's life left in you. I can do no more. — Yours truly, J. M.'

"As I came to those last words, I heard the hammering down of the hatch over my head. I don't suppose I'm more of a coward than most people — but there was a moment when the sweat poured down me

like rain. I got to be my own man again, before the hammering was done, and found myself thinking of somebody very dear to me in England. I said to myself, 'I'll have a try for my life, for her sake, though the chances are dead against me.'

"I put a letter from that person I have mentioned into one of the stoppered bottles of my dressing-case — along with the mate's warning, in case I lived to see him again. I hung this, and a flask of whisky, in a sling round my neck — and, after first dressing myself in my confusion, thought better of it, and stripped again, for swimming, to my shirt and drawers. By the time I had done that, the hammering was over, and there was such a silence that I could hear the water bubbling into the scuttled vessel amidships. The next noise was the noise of the boat and the villains in her (always excepting my friend the mate) shoving off from the starboard side. I waited for the splash of the oars in the water, and then got my back under the hatch. The mate had kept his promise. I lifted it easily — crept across the deck, under cover of the bulwarks, on all fours — and slipped into the sea on the port side. Lots of things were floating about. I took the first thing I came to — a hencoop — and swam away with it about a couple of hundred yards, keeping the yacht between me and the boat. Having got that distance, I was seized with a shivering fit, and I stopped (fearing the cramp next) to take a pull at my flask. When I had closed the flask again, I turned for a moment to look back, and saw the yacht in the act of sinking. In a minute more there was nothing between me and the boat, but the pieces of wreck that had been purposely thrown out to float.

The moon was shining; and, if they had had a glass in the boat, I believe they might have seen my head, though I carefully kept the hencoop between me and them.

"As it was, they laid on their oars; and I heard loud voices among them disputing. After what seemed an age to me, I discovered what the dispute was about. The boat's head was suddenly turned my way. Some cleverer scoundrel than the rest (the sailing-master, I daresay,) had evidently persuaded them to row back over the place where the yacht had gone down, and make quite sure that I had gone down with her.

"They were more than half way across the distance that separated us, and I had given myself up for lost, when I heard a cry from one of them, and saw the boat's progress suddenly checked. In a minute or two more, the boat's head was turned again; and they rowed straight away from me like men rowing for their lives.

"I looked on one side, towards the land, and saw nothing. I looked on the other, towards the sea, and discovered what the boat's crew had discovered before me — a sail in the distance, growing steadily brighter and bigger in the moonlight the longer I looked at it. In a quarter of an hour more the vessel was within hail of me, and the crew had got me on board.

"They were all foreigners, and they quite deafened me by their jabber. I tried signs, but before I could make them understand me, I was seized with another shivering fit, and was carried below. The vessel held on her course, I have no doubt, but I was in no condition to know anything about it. Before morning, I was in a fever; and from that time I can remember

nothing clearly till I came to my senses at this place, and found myself under the care of a Hungarian merchant, the consignee (as they call it) of the coasting vessel that had picked me up. He speaks English as well or better than I do; and he has treated me with a kindness which I can find no words to praise. When he was a young man he was in England himself, learning business, and he says he has remembrances of our country which make his heart warm towards an Englishman. He has fitted me out with clothes, and has lent me the money to travel with, as soon as the doctor allows me to start for home. Supposing I don't get a relapse, I shall be fit to travel in a week's time from this. If I can catch the mail at Trieste, and stand the fatigue, I shall be back again at Thorpe-Ambrose in a week or ten days at most after you get my letter. You will agree with me that it is a terribly long letter. But I can't help that. I seem to have lost my old knack at putting things short, and finishing on the first page. However, I am near the end now — for I have nothing left to mention but the reason why I write about what has happened to me, instead of waiting till I get home, and telling it all by word of mouth.

"I fancy my head is still muddled by my illness. At any rate, it only struck me this morning that there is barely a chance of some vessel having passed the place where the yacht foundered, and having picked up the furniture, and other things wrenched out of her and left to float. Some false report of my being drowned may, in that case, have reached England. If this has happened (which I hope to God may be an unfounded fear on my part), go directly to Major Mil-

roy at the cottage. Show him this letter — I have written it quite as much for his eye as for yours — and then give him the enclosed note, and ask him if he doesn't think the circumstances justify me in hoping he will send it to Miss Milroy. I can't explain why I don't write directly to the major, or to Miss Milroy, instead of to you. I can only say there are considerations I am bound in honour to respect, which oblige me to act in this round-about way.

"I don't ask you to answer this — for I shall be on my way home, I hope, long before your letter could reach me in this out-of-the-way place. Whatever you do, don't lose a moment in going to Major Milroy. Go, on second thoughts, whether the loss of the yacht is known in England or not.

"Yours truly,
"ALLAN ARMADALE."

"I looked up when I had come to the end of the letter, and saw, for the first time, that Bashwood had left his chair, and had placed himself opposite to me. He was intently studying my face, with the inquiring expression of a man who was trying to read my thoughts. His eyes fell guiltily when they met mine, and he shrank away to his chair. Believing, as he did, that I was really married to Armadale, was he trying to discover whether the news of Armadale's rescue from the sea was good news or bad news, in my estimation? It was no time then for entering into explanations with him. The first thing to be done was to communicate instantly with the doctor. I called Bashwood back to me, and gave him my hand.

"'You have done me a service,' I said, 'which

makes us closer friends than ever. I shall say more about this, and about other matters of some interest to both of us, later in the day. I want you now to lend me Mr. Armadale's letter (which I promise to bring back) and to wait here till I return. Will you do that for me, Mr. Bashwood?'

"He would do anything I asked him, he said. I went into the bedroom, and put on my bonnet and shawl.

"'Let me be quite sure of the facts before I leave you,' I resumed, when I was ready to go out. 'You have not shown this letter to anybody but me?"

"'Not a living soul has seen it but our two selves.'

"'What have you done with the note enclosed to Miss Milroy?'

"He produced it from his pocket. I ran it over rapidly — saw that there was nothing in it of the slightest importance — and put it in the fire on the spot. That done, I left Bashwood in the sitting-room, and went to the Sanatorium, with Armadale's letter in my hand.

"The doctor had gone out; and the servant was unable to say positively at what time he would be back. I went into his study, and wrote a line preparing him for the news I had brought with me, which I sealed up, with Armadale's letter, in an envelope, to await his return. Having told the servant I would call again in an hour, I left the place.

"It was useless to go back to my lodgings and speak to Bashwood, until I knew first what the doctor meant to do. I walked about the neighbourhood, up

and down new streets and crescents and squares, with a kind of dull numbed feeling in me, which prevented, not only all voluntary exercise of thought, but all sensation of bodily fatigue. I remembered the same feeling overpowering me, years ago, on the morning when the people of the prison came to take me into court to be tried for my life. All that frightful scene came back again to my mind, in the strangest manner, as if it had been a scene in which some other person had figured. Once or twice I wondered, in a heavy senseless way, why they had not hanged me!

"When I went back to the Sanatorium, I was informed that the doctor had returned half-an-hour since, and that he was in his own room anxiously waiting to see me.

"I went into the study, and found him sitting close by the fire with his head down, and his hands on his knees. On the table near him, besides Armadale's letter and my note, I saw, in the little circle of light thrown by the reading-lamp, an open railway guide. Was he meditating flight? It was impossible to tell from his face, when he looked up at me, what he was meditating, or how the shock had struck him when he first discovered that Armadale was a living man.

"'Take a seat near the fire,' he said. 'It's very raw and cold to-day.'

"I took a chair in silence. In silence, on his side, the doctor sat rubbing his knees before the fire.

"'Have you nothing to say to me?' I asked.

"He rose, and suddenly removed the shade from the reading-lamp, so that the light fell on my face.

"'You are not looking well,' he said. 'What's the matter?'

"'My head feels dull, and my eyes are heavy and hot,' I replied. 'The weather, I suppose.'

"It was strange how we both got farther and farther from the one vitally important subject which we had both come together to discuss!

"'I think a cup of tea would do you good,' remarked the doctor.

"I accepted his suggestion; and he ordered the tea. While it was coming, he walked up and down the room, and I sat by the fire — and not a word passed between us on either side.

"The tea revived me; and the doctor noticed a change for the better in my face. He sat down opposite to me at the table, and spoke out at last.

"'If I had ten thousand pounds at this moment,' he began, 'I would give the whole of it never to have compromised myself in your desperate speculation on Mr. Armadale's death!'

"He said those words with an abruptness, almost with a violence which was strangely uncharacteristic of his ordinary manner. Was he frightened himself, or was he trying to frighten me? I determined to make him explain himself at the outset, so far as I was concerned. 'Wait a moment, doctor,' I said. 'Do you hold me responsible for what has happened?'

"'Certainly not,' he replied, stiffly. 'Neither you nor anybody could have foreseen what has happened. When I say I would give ten thousand pounds to be out of this business, I am blaming nobody but myself. And when I tell you next, that I, for one, won't allow Mr. Armadale's resurrection from the sea

to be the ruin of me without a fight for it, I tell you, my dear madam, one of the plainest truths I ever told to man or woman, in the whole course of my life. Don't suppose I am invidiously separating my interests from yours, in the common danger that now threatens us both. I simply indicate the difference in the risk that we have respectively run. *You* have not sunk the whole of your resources in establishing a Sanatorium; and *you* have not made a false declaration before a magistrate, which is punishable as perjury by the law.'

"I interrupted him again. His selfishness did me more good than his tea — it roused my temper effectually. 'Suppose we let your risk and my risk alone, and come to the point,' I said. 'What do you mean by making a fight for it? I see a railway guide on your table. Does making a fight for it, mean — running away?'

"'Running away?' repeated the doctor. 'You appear to forget that every farthing I have in the world is embarked in this establishment.'

"'You stop here then?' I said.

"'Unquestionably!'

"'And what do you mean to do when Mr. Armadale comes to England?'

"A solitary fly, the last of his race whom the winter had spared, was buzzing feebly about the doctor's face. He caught it before he answered me, and held it out across the table in his closed hand.

"'If this fly's name was Armadale,' he said, 'and if you had got him as I have got him now, what would *you* do?'

"His eyes, fixed on my face up to this time,

turned significantly, as he ended this question, to my widow's dress. I, too, looked at it, when he looked. A thrill of the old deadly hatred, and the old deadly determination, ran through me again.

"'I should kill him,' I said.

"The doctor started to his feet (with the fly still in his hand), and looked at me — a little too theatrically — with an expression of the utmost horror.

"'Kill him!' repeated the doctor in a paroxysm of virtuous alarm. 'Violence — murderous violence — in my Sanatorium! You take my breath away!'

"I caught his eye, while he was expressing himself in this elaborately indignant manner, scrutinizing me with a searching curiosity which was, to say the least of it, a little at variance with the vehemence of his language and the warmth of his tone. He laughed uneasily, when our eyes met, and recovered his smoothly confidential manner in the instant that elapsed before he spoke again.

"'I beg a thousand pardons,' he said. 'I ought to have known better than to take a lady too literally at her word. Permit me to remind you, however, that the circumstances are too serious for anything in the nature of — let us say, an exaggeration or a joke. You shall hear what I propose, without further preface.' He paused, and resumed his figurative use of the fly imprisoned in his hand. 'Here is Mr. Armadale. I can let him out, or keep him in, just as I please — and he knows it. I say to him,' continued the doctor, facetiously addressing the fly, 'Give me proper security, Mr. Armadale, that no proceedings of any sort shall be taken against either this lady or myself, and I will let you out of the hollow of my

hand. Refuse — and be the risk what it may, I will keep you in.' Can you doubt, my dear madam, what Mr. Armadale's answer is, sooner or later, certain to be? Can you doubt,' said the doctor, suiting the action to the word, and letting the fly go, 'that it will end to the entire satisfaction of all parties, in this way?'

"'I won't say at present,' I answered; 'whether I doubt or not. Let me make sure that I understand you first. You propose, if I am not mistaken, to shut the doors of this place on Mr. Armadale, and not to let him out again, until he has agreed to the terms which it is our interest to impose on him? May I ask, in that case, how you mean to make him walk into the trap that you have set for him here?'

"'I propose,' said the doctor, with his hand on the railway guide, 'ascertaining first, at what time during every evening of this month the tidal trains from Dover and Folkestone reach the London Bridge terminus. And I propose next, posting a person whom Mr. Armadale knows, and whom you and I can trust, to wait the arrival of the trains, and to meet our man at the moment when he steps out of the railway carriage."

"'Have you thought,' I inquired, 'of who the person is to be?'

"'I have thought,' said the doctor, taking up Armadale's letter, 'of the person to whom this letter is addressed.'

"The answer startled me. Was it possible that he and Bashwood knew one another? I put the question immediately.

"'Until to-day, I never so much as heard of the

gentleman's name,' said the doctor. 'I have simply pursued the inductive process of reasoning, for which we are indebted to the immortal Bacon. How does this very important letter come into your possession? I can't insult you by supposing it to have been stolen. Consequently, it has come to you with the leave and license of the person to whom it is addressed. Consequently, that person is in your confidence. Consequently, he is the first person I think of. You see the process? Very good. Permit me a question or two, on the subject of Mr. Bashwood, before we go on any further.'

"The doctor's questions went as straight to the point as asual. My answers informed him that Mr. Bashwood stood towards Armadale in the relation of steward — that he had received the letter at Thorpe-Ambrose that morning, and had brought it straight to me by the first train — that he had not shown it, or spoken of it before leaving, to Major Milroy or to any one else — that I had not obtained this service at his hands by trusting him with my secret — that I had communicated with him in the character of Armadale's widow — that he had suppressed the letter, under those circumstances, solely in obedience to a general caution I had given him, to keep his own counsel if anything strange happened at Thorpe-Ambrose, until he had first consulted me — and lastly, that the reason why he had done as I told him, in this matter, was, that in this matter, and in all others, Mr. Bashwood was blindly devoted to my interests.

"At that point in the interrogatory, the doctor's eyes began to look at me distrustfully, behind the doctor's spectacles.

"'What is the secret of this blind devotion of Mr. Bashwood's to your interests?' he asked.

"I hesitated for a moment — in pity to Bashwood, not in pity to myself. 'If you must know,' I answered, 'Mr. Bashwood is in love with me.'

"Ay! ay!' exclaimed the doctor, with an air of relief. 'I begin to unterstand now. Is he a young man?'

"'He is an old man.'

"The doctor laid himself back in his chair, and chuckled softly. 'Better and better!' he said. 'Here is the very man we want. Who so fit as Mr. Armadale's steward to meet Mr. Armadale on his return to London? And who so capable of influencing Mr. Bashwood in the proper way as the charming object of Mr. Bashwood's admiration?'

"There could be no doubt that Bashwood was the man to serve the doctor's purpose, and that my influence was to be trusted to make him serve it. The difficulty was not here — the difficulty was in the unanswered question that I had put to the doctor a minute since. I put it to him again.

"'Suppose Mr. Armadale's steward meets his employer at the terminus,' I said; 'may I ask once more how Mr. Armadale is to be persuaded to come here?'

"'Don't think me ungallant,' rejoined the doctor in his gentlest manner, 'if I ask, on my side, how are men persuaded to do nine-tenths of the foolish acts of their lives? They are persuaded by your charming sex. The weak side of every man is the woman's side of him. We have only to discover the woman's side of Mr. Armadale — to tickle him on it gently — and to lead him our way with a silken string. I observe

here,' pursued the doctor, opening Armadale's letter, 'a reference to a certain young lady, which looks promising. Where is the note that Mr. Armadale speaks of as addressed to Miss Milroy?'

"Instead of answering him, I started, in a sudden burst of excitement, to my feet. The instant he mentioned Miss Milroy's name, all that I had heard from Bashwood of her illness, and of the cause of it, rushed back into my memory. I saw the means of decoying Armadale into the Sanatorium, as plainly as I saw the doctor on the other side of the table, wondering at the extraordinary change in me. What a luxury it was to make Miss Milroy serve my interests at last!

"'Never mind the note,' I said. 'It's burnt, for fear of accidents. I can tell you all (and more) than the note could have told you. Miss Milroy cuts the knot! Miss Milroy ends the difficulty! She is privately engaged to him. She has heard the false report of his death; and she has been seriously ill at Thorpe-Ambrose ever since. When Bashwood meets him at the station, the very first question he is certain to ask ——'

"'I see!' exclaimed the doctor, anticipating me. 'Mr. Bashwood has nothing to do but to help the truth with a touch of fiction. When he tells his master that the false report has reached Miss Milroy, he has only to add that the shock has affected her head, and that she is here under medical care. Perfect! perfect! We shall have him at the Sanatorium as fast as the fastest cabhorse in London can bring him to us. And mind! no risk — no necessity for trusting other people. This

is not a madhouse; this is not a Licensed Establishment — no doctors' certificates are necessary here! My dear lady, I congratulate you; I congratulate myself. Permit me to hand you the railway guide, with my best compliments to Mr. Bashwood, and with the page turned down for him, as an additional attention, at the right place.'

"Remembering how long I had kept Bashwood waiting for me, I took the book at once, and wished the doctor good evening without further ceremony. As he politely opened the door for me, he reverted, without the slightest necessity for doing so, and without a word from me to lead to it, to the outburst of virtuous alarm which had escaped him at the earlier part of our interview.

"'I do hope,' he said, 'that you will kindly forget and forgive my extraordinary want of tact and perception when — in short, when I caught the fly. I positively blush at my own stupidity in putting a literal interpretation on a lady's little joke! Violence in My Sanatorium!' exclaimed the doctor, with his eyes once more fixed attentively on my face, 'violence in this enlightened nineteenth century! Was there ever anything so ridiculous? Do fasten your cloak before you go out — it is so cold and raw! Shall I escort you? Shall I send my servant? Ah, you were always independent! always, if I may say so, a host in yourself! May I call to-morrow morning, and hear what you have settled with Mr. Bashwood?'

"I said yes, and got away from him at last. In a quarter of an hour more I was back at my lodgings, and was informed by the servant that 'the elderly gentleman' was still waiting for me.

"I have not got the heart, or the patience — I hardly know which — to waste many words on what passed between me and Bashwood. It was so easy, so degradingly easy, to pull the strings of the poor old puppet in any way I pleased! I met none of the difficulties which I should have been obliged to meet in the case of a younger man, or of a man less infatuated with admiration for me. I left the allusions to Miss Milroy in Armadale's letter, which had naturally puzzled him, to be explained at a future time. I never even troubled myself to invent a plausible reason for wishing him to meet Armadale at the terminus, and to entrap him by a stratagem into the doctor's Sanatorium. All that I found it necessary to do was to refer to what I had written to Mr. Bashwood, on my arrival in London, and to what I had afterwards said to him, when he came to answer my letter personally at the hotel.

"'You know already,' I said, 'that my marriage has not been a happy one. Draw your own conclusions from that — and don't press me to tell you whether the news of Mr. Armadale's rescue from the sea is, or is not, the welcome news that it ought to be to his wife!' That was enough to put his withered old face in a glow, and to set his withered old hopes growing again. I had only to add, 'If you will do what I ask you to do, no matter how incomprehensible and how mysterious my request may seem to be; and if you will accept my assurances that you shall run no risk yourself, and that you shall receive the proper explanations at the proper time — you will have such a claim on my gratitude and my regard as no man living has ever had yet!' I had only to say those

words, and to point them by a look and a stolen pressure of his hand; and I had him at my feet, blindly eager to obey me. If he could have seen what I thought of myself — but that doesn't matter: he saw nothing.

"Hours have passed since I sent him away (pledged to secrecy, possessed of his instructions, and provided with his time-table) to the hotel near the terminus, at which he is to stay till Armadale appears on the railway platform. The excitement of the earlier part of the evening has all worn off; and the dull, numbed sensation has got me again. Are my energies wearing out, I wonder, just at the time when I most want them? Or is some foreshadowing of disaster creeping over me which I don't yet understand?

"I might be in a humour to sit here for some time longer, thinking thoughts like these, and letting them find their way into words at their own will and pleasure — if my Diary would only let me. But my idle pen has been busy enough to make its way to the end of the volume. I have reached the last morsel of space left on the last page; and whether I like it or not, I must close the book this time for good and all, when I close it to-night.

"Good-by, my old friend and companion of many a miserable day! Having nothing else to be fond of, I half suspect myself of having been unreasonably fond of *you*.

"What a fool I am!"

THE END OF THE FOURTH BOOK.

BOOK THE LAST.

CHAPTER I.

At the Terminus.

On the night of the second of December, Mr. Bashwood took up his post of observation at the terminus of the South Eastern Railway for the first time. It was an earlier date, by six days, than the date which Allan had himself fixed for his return. But the doctor, taking counsel of his medical experience, had considered it just probable that "Mr. Armadale might be perverse enough, at his enviable age, to recover sooner than his medical advisers might have anticipated." For caution's sake, therefore, Mr. Bashwood was instructed to begin watching the arrival of the tidal trains, on the day after he had received his employer's letter.

From the second to the seventh of December, the steward waited punctually on the platform, saw the trains come in, and satisfied himself, evening after evening, that the travellers were all strangers to him. From the second to the seventh of December, Miss Gwilt (to return to the name under which she is best known in these pages) received his daily report, sometimes delivered personally, sometimes sent by letter. The doctor, to whom the reports were communicated, received them in his turn with unabated confidence in the precautions that had been adopted, up to the morn-

ing of the eighth. On that date, the irritation of continued suspense had produced a change for the worse in Miss Gwilt's variable temper, which was perceptible to every one about her, and which, strangely enough, was reflected by an equally marked change in the doctor's manner when he came to pay his usual visit. By a coincidence so extraordinary, that his enemies might have suspected it of not being a coincidence at all, the morning on which Miss Gwilt lost her patience, proved to be also the morning on which the doctor lost his confidence for the first time.

"No news, of course," he said, sitting down with a heavy sigh. "Well! well!"

Miss Gwilt looked up at him irritably, from her work.

"You seem strangely depressed this morning," she said. "What are you afraid of now?"

"The imputation of being afraid, madam," answered the doctor solemnly, "is not an imputation to cast rashly on any man — even when he belongs to such an essentially peaceful profession as mine. I am not afraid. I am (as you more correctly put it in the first instance) strangely depressed. My nature is, as you know, naturally sanguine, and I only see to-day, what, but for my habitual hopefulness, I might have seen, and ought to have seen, a week since."

Miss Gwilt impatiently threw down her work. "If words cost money," she said, "the luxury of talking would be rather an expensive luxury, in your case!"

"Which I might have seen, and ought to have seen," reiterated the doctor, without taking the slightest notice of the interruption, "a week since. To put it plainly, I feel by no means so certain as I did, that

Mr. Armadale will consent, without a struggle, to the terms which it is my interest (and in a minor degree yours) to impose on him. Observe! I don't question our entrapping him successfully into the Sanatorium — I only doubt whether he will prove quite as manageable as I originally anticipated, when we have got him there. Say," remarked the doctor, raising his eyes for the first time, and fixing them in steady inquiry on Miss Gwilt; "say that he is bold, obstinate, what you please; and that he holds out — holds out for weeks together, for months together, as men in similar situations to his have held out before him. What follows? The risk of keeping him forcibly in concealment — of suppressing him, if I may so express myself — increases at compound interest, and becomes, Enormous! My house is, at this moment, virtually ready for patients. Patients may present themselves in a week's time. Patients may communicate with Mr. Armadale, or Mr. Armadale may communicate with patients. A note may be smuggled out of the house, and may reach the Commissioners in Lunacy. Even in the case of an unlicensed establishment like mine, those gentlemen — no! those chartered despots in a land of liberty — have only to apply to the Lord Chancellor for an order, and to enter (by heavens, to enter My Sanatorium!) and search the house from top to bottom at a moment's notice! I don't wish to despond; I don't wish to alarm you; I don't pretend to say that the means we are taking to secure our own safety are any other than the best means at our disposal. All I ask you to do is to imagine the Commissioners in the house — and then to conceive the consequences. The consequences!" repeated the doctor,

getting sternly on his feet, and taking up his hat as if he meant to leave the room.

"Have you anything more to say?" asked Miss Gwilt.

"Have you any remarks," rejoined the doctor, "to offer on your side?"

He stood hat in hand, waiting. For a full minute the two looked at each other in silence.

Miss Gwilt spoke first.

"I think I understand you," she said, suddenly recovering her composure.

"I beg your pardon," returned the doctor, with his hand to his ear. "What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"If you happened to catch another fly this morning," said Miss Gwilt, with a bitterly sarcastic emphasis on the words, "I might be capable of shocking you by another 'little joke.'"

The doctor held up both hands, in polite deprecation, and looked as if he was beginning to recover his good humour again.

"Hard," he murmured gently, "not to have forgiven me that unlucky blunder of mine, even yet!"

"What else have you to say? I am waiting for you," said Miss Gwilt. She turned her chair to the window scornfully, and took up her work again, as she spoke.

The doctor came behind her, and put his hand on the back of her chair.

"I have a question to ask, in the first place," he said; "and a measure of necessary precaution to suggest

in the second. If you will honour me with your attention, I will put the question first."

"I am listening."

"You know that Mr. Armadale is alive," pursued the doctor; "and you know that he is coming back to England. Why do you continue to wear your widow's dress?"

She answered him without an instant's hesitation, steadily going on with her work.

"Because I am of a sanguine disposition, like you. I mean to trust to the chapter of accidents to the very last. Mr. Armadale may die yet, on his way home."

"And suppose he gets home alive — what then?"

"Then there is another chance still left."

"What is it, pray?"

"He may die in your Sanatorium."

"Madam!" remonstrated the doctor in the deep bass which he reserved for his outbursts of virtuous indignation. "Wait! you spoke of the chapter of accidents," he resumed, gliding back into his softer conversational tones. "Yes! yes! of course. I understand you this time. Even the healing art is at the mercy of accidents — even such a Sanatorium as mine is liable to be surprised by Death. Just so! just so!" said the doctor, conceding the question with the utmost impartiality. "There *is* the chapter of accidents, I admit — if you choose to trust to it. Mind! I say emphatically, *if* you choose to trust to it."

There was another moment of silence — silence so profound that nothing was audible in the room but the rapid *click* of Miss Gwilt's needle through her work.

"Go on," she said; "you haven't done yet."

"True!" said the doctor. "Having put my question, I have my measure of precaution to impress on you next. You will see, my dear madam, that I am not disposed to trust to the chapter of accidents on my side. Reflection has convinced me that you and I are not (locally speaking) so conveniently situated as we might be, in case of emergency. Cabs are, as yet, rare in this rapidly-improving neighbourhood. I am twenty minutes' walk from you; you are twenty minutes' walk from me. I know nothing of Mr. Armadale's character; you know it well. It might be necessary — vitally necessary — to appeal to your superior knowledge of him at a moment's notice. And how am I to do that unless we are within easy reach of each other, under the same roof? In both our interests, I beg to invite you, my dear madam, to become for a limited period an inmate of My Sanatorium."

Miss Gwilt's rapid needle suddenly stopped. "I understand you," she said again, as quietly as before.

"I beg your pardon," said the doctor, with another attack of deafness, and with his hand once more at his ear.

She laughed to herself — a low, terrible laugh, which startled even the doctor into taking his hand off the back of her chair.

"An inmate of your Sanatorium?" she repeated. "You consult appearances in everything else — do you propose to consult appearances in receiving me into your house?"

"Most assuredly!" replied the doctor, with enthusiasm. "I am surprised at your asking me the question! Did you ever know a man of any eminence in my profession who set appearances at defiance? If you

honour me by accepting my invitation, you enter My Sanatorium in the most unimpeachable of all possible characters — in the character of a Patient."

"When do you want my answer?"

"Can you decide to-day?"

"No."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes. Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing more."

"Leave me then. *I* don't keep up appearances. I wish to be alone — and I say so. Good morning."

"Oh, the sex! the sex!" said the doctor, with his excellent temper in perfect working order again. "So delightfully impulsive! so charmingly reckless of what they say, or how they say it! 'Oh, woman, in our hours of ease, uncertain, coy, and hard to please!' There! there! there! Good morning!"

Miss Gwilt rose and looked after him contemptuously from the window, when the street-door had closed, and he had left the house.

"Armadale himself drove me to it the first time," she said. "Manuel drove me to it the second time. — You cowardly scoundrel! shall I let *you* drive me to it for the third time and the last?"

She turned from the window, and looked thoughtfully at her widow's dress in the glass.

The hours of the day passed — and she decided nothing. The night came — and she hesitated still. The new morning dawned — and the terrible question was still unanswered.

By the early post there came a letter for her. It was Mr. Bashwood's usual report. Again he had watched for Allan's arrival, and again in vain.

"I'll have more time!" she determined passionately. "No man alive shall hurry me faster than I like!"

At breakfast that morning (the morning of the ninth) the doctor was surprised in his study by a visit from Miss Gwilt.

"I want another day," she said, the moment the servant had closed the door on her.

The doctor looked at her before he answered, and saw the danger of driving her to extremities plainly expressed in her face.

"The time is getting on," he remonstrated in his most persuasive manner. "For all we know to the contrary, Mr. Armadale may be here to-night."

"I want another day!" she repeated, loudly and passionately.

"Granted!" said the doctor, looking nervously towards the door. "Don't be too loud — the servants may hear you. Mind!" he added, "I depend on your honour not to press me for any further delay."

"You had better depend on my despair," she said — and left him.

The doctor chipped the shell of his egg, and laughed softly.

"Quite right, my dear!" he thought. "I remember where your despair led you in past times; and I think I may trust it to lead you the same way now."

At a quarter to eight o'clock that night, Mr. Bashwood took up his post of observation as usual on the platform of the terminus at London Bridge. He was in the highest good spirits; he smiled and smirked in irrepressible exultation. The sense that he held in reserve a means of influence over Miss Gwilt, in virtue

of his knowledge of her past career, had had no share in effecting the transformation that now appeared in him. It had upheld his courage in his forlorn life at Thorpe-Ambrose, and it had given him that increased confidence of manner which Miss Gwilt herself had noticed; but, from the moment when he had regained his old place in her favour, it had vanished as a motive power in him, annihilated by the electric shock of her touch and her look. His vanity — the vanity which in men at his age is only despair in disguise — had now lifted him to the seventh heaven of fatuous happiness once more. He believed in her again as he believed in the smart new winter over-coat that he wore — as he believed in the dainty little cane (appropriate to the dawning dandyism of lads in their teens) that he flourished in his hand. He hummed! The worn-out old creature who had not sung since his childhood, hummed as he paced the platform the few fragments he could remember of a worn-out old song.

The train was due as early as eight o'clock that night. At five minutes past the hour, the whistle sounded. In less than five minutes more, the passengers were getting out on the platform.

Following the instructions that had been given to him, Mr. Bashwood made his way as well as the crowd would let him, along the line of carriages; and discovering no familiar face on that first investigation, joined the passengers for a second search among them in the custom-house waiting-room next.

He had looked round the room, and had satisfied himself that the persons occupying it were all strangers, when he heard a voice behind him, exclaiming, "Can that be Mr. Bashwood!"

He turned in eager expectation; and found himself face to face with the last man under heaven whom he had expected to see.

The man was MIDWINTER.

CHAPTER II.

In the House.

NOTICING Mr. Bashwood's confusion (after a moment's glance at the change in his personal appearance), Midwinter spoke first.

"I see I have surprised you," he said. "You were looking, I suppose, for somebody else? Have you heard from Allan? Is he on his way home again already?"

The inquiry about Allan, though it would naturally have suggested itself to any one in Midwinter's position at that moment, added to Mr. Bashwood's confusion. Not knowing how else to extricate himself from the critical position in which he was placed, he took refuge in simple denial.

"I know nothing about Mr. Armadale — oh dear, no, sir, I know nothing about Mr. Armadale," he answered with needless eagerness and hurry. "Welcome back to England, sir," he went on, changing the subject in his nervously talkative manner. "I didn't know you had been abroad. It's so long since we have had the pleasure — since I have had the pleasure. — Have you enjoyed yourself, sir, in foreign parts? Such different manners from ours — yes, yes, yes, — such different manners from ours! Do you make a long stay in England, now you have come back?"

"I hardly know," said Midwinter. "I have been

obliged to alter my plans, and to come to England unexpectedly." He hesitated a little; his manner changed, and he added in lower tones, "A serious anxiety has brought me back. I can't say what my plans will be until that anxiety is set at rest."

The light of a lamp fell on his face while he spoke, and Mr. Bashwood observed, for the first time, that he looked sadly worn and changed.

"I'm sorry, sir — I'm sure I'm very sorry. If I could be of any use —?" suggested Mr. Bashwood, speaking under the influence, in some degree of his nervous politeness, and in some degree of his remembrance of what Midwinter had done for him at Thorpe-Ambrose in the bygone time.

Midwinter thanked him, and turned away sadly. "I am afraid you can be of no use, Mr. Bashwood — but I am obliged to you for your offer, all the same." He stopped, and considered a little, "Suppose she should *not* be ill? Suppose some misfortune should have happened?" he resumed, speaking to himself, and turning again towards the steward. "If she has left her mother, some trace of her *might* be found by inquiring at Thorpe-Ambrose."

Mr. Bashwood's curiosity was instantly aroused. The whole sex was interesting to him now, for the sake of Miss Gwilt.

"A lady, sir?" he inquired. "Are you looking for a lady?"

"I am looking," said Midwinter simply, "for my wife."

"Married, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Bashwood. "Married since I last had the pleasure of seeing you! Might I take the liberty of asking —?"

Midwinter's eyes dropped uneasily to the ground.

"You knew the lady in former times," he said. "I have married Miss Gwilt."

The steward started back, as he might have started back from a loaded pistol, levelled at his head. His eyes glared as if he had suddenly lost his senses, and the nervous trembling to which he was subject shook him from head to foot.

"What's the matter?" asked Midwinter. There was no answer. "What is there so very startling," he went on, a little impatiently, "in Miss Gwilt's being my wife?"

"*Your* wife?" repeated Mr. Bashwood, helplessly. "Mrs. Armadale —!" He checked himself by a desperate effort, and said no more.

The stupor of astonishment which possessed the steward was instantly reflected in Midwinter's face. The name in which he had secretly married his wife had passed the lips of the last man in the world whom he would have dreamed of admitting into his confidence! He took Mr. Bashwood by the arm, and led him away to a quieter part of the terminus than the part of it in which they had hitherto spoken to each other.

"You referred to my wife just now," he said; "and you spoke of *Mrs. Armadale* in the same breath. What do you mean by that?"

Again there was no answer. Utterly incapable of understanding more than that he had involved himself in some serious complication which was a complete mystery to him, Mr. Bashwood struggled to extricate himself from the grasp that was laid on him, and struggled in vain.

Midwinter sternly repeated the question. "I ask you again," he said, "what do you mean by it?"

"Nothing, sir! I give you my word of honour I meant nothing!" He felt the hand on his arm tightening its grasp; he saw, even in the obscurity of the remote corner in which they stood, that Midwinter's fiery temper was rising, and was not to be trifled with. The extremity of his danger inspired him with the one ready capacity that a timid man possesses when he is compelled by main force to face an emergency — the capacity to lie. "I only meant to say, sir," he burst out, with a desperate effort to look and speak confidently, "that Mr. Armadale would be surprised —"

"You said *Mrs.* Armadale!"

"No, sir — on my word of honour, on my sacred word of honour, you are mistaken — you are indeed! I said *Mr.* Armadale — how could I say anything else? Please to let me go, sir — I'm pressed for time I do assure you I'm dreadfully pressed for time!"

For a moment longer Midwinter maintained his hold, and in that moment he decided what to do.

He had accurately stated his motive for returning to England as proceeding from anxiety about his wife — anxiety naturally caused (after the regular receipt of a letter from her every other, or every third day) by the sudden cessation of the correspondence between them on her side for a whole week. The first vaguely-terrible suspicion of some other reason for her silence than the reason of accident or of illness, to which he had hitherto attributed it, had struck through him like a sudden chill the instant he heard the steward associate the name of "Mrs. Armadale" with the idea of his wife. Little irregularities in her correspondence with

him, which he had thus far only thought strange, now came back on his mind and proclaimed themselves to be suspicious as well. He had hitherto believed the reasons she had given for referring him, when he answered her letters, to no more definite address than an address at a post-office. *Now* he suspected her reasons of being excuses, for the first time. He had hitherto resolved, on reaching London, to inquire at the only place he knew of at which a clue to her could be found — the address she had given him as the address at which "her mother" lived. *Now* (with a motive which he was afraid to define even to himself, but which was strong enough to overbear every other consideration in his mind), he determined, before all things, to solve the mystery of Mr. Bashwood's familiarity with a secret, which was a marriage-secret between himself and his wife. Any direct appeal to a man of the steward's disposition, in the steward's present state of mind, would be evidently useless. The weapon of deception was, in this case, a weapon literally forced into Midwinter's hands. He let go of Mr. Bashwood's arm, and accepted Mr. Bashwood's explanation.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I have no doubt you are right. Pray attribute my rudeness to over-anxiety and over-fatigue. I wish you good evening."

The station was by this time almost a solitude; the passengers by the train being assembled at the examination of their luggage in the custom-house waiting-room. It was no easy matter, ostensibly to take leave of Mr. Bashwood, and really to keep him in view. But Midwinter's early life with his gipsy master had been of a nature to practise him in such stratagems as he was now compelled to adopt. He walked away towards

the waiting-room by the line of empty carriages — opened the door of one of them, as if to look after something that he had left behind — and detected Mr. Bashwood making for the cab-rank on the opposite side of the platform. In an instant, Midwinter had crossed, and had passed through the long row of vehicles, so as to skirt it on the side farthest from the platform. He entered the second cab by the left-hand door, the moment after Mr. Bashwood had entered the first cab by the right-hand door. "Double your fare, whatever it is," he said to the driver, "if you keep the cab before you in view, and follow it wherever it goes." In a minute more both vehicles were on their way out of the station.

The clerk sat in his sentry-box at the gate, taking down the destinations of the cabs as they passed. Midwinter heard the man who was driving him, call out "Hamsptead!" as he went by the clerk's window."

"Why did you say 'Hampstead?' he asked when they had left the station.

"Because the man before me said 'Hampstead,' sir," answered the driver.

Over and over again, on the wearisome journey to the north-western suburb, Midwinter asked if the cab was still in sight. Over and over again, the man answered, "Right in front of us."

It was between nine and ten o'clock, when the driver pulled up his horse at last. Midwinter got out, and saw the cab before them, waiting at a house-door. As soon as he had satisfied himself that the driver was the man whom Mr. Bashwood had hired, he paid the promised reward, and dismissed his own cab.

He took a turn backwards and forwards before the

door. The vaguely terrible suspicion which had risen in his mind at the terminus, had forced itself by this time into a definite form which was abhorrent to him. Without the shadow of an assignable reason for it, he found himself blindly distrusting his wife's fidelity, and blindly suspecting Mr. Bashwood of serving her in the capacity of go-between. In sheer horror of his own morbid fancy, he determined to take down the number of the house, and the name of the street in which it stood — and then, in justice to his wife, to return at once to the address which she had given him as the address at which her mother lived. He had taken out his pocket-book, and was on his way to the corner of the street, when he observed the man who had driven Mr. Bashwood, looking at him with an expression of inquisitive surprise. The idea of questioning the cab-driver, while he had the opportunity, instantly occurred to him. He took a half-crown from his pocket and put it into the man's ready hand.

"Has the gentleman whom you drove from the station, gone into that house?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear him inquire for anybody when the door was opened?"

"He asked for a lady, sir. Mrs.—" The man hesitated. "It wasn't a common name, sir; I should know it again if I heard it."

"Was it 'Midwinter?'"

"No, sir."

"'Armadale?'"

"That's it, sir. Mrs. Armadale."

"Are you sure it was 'Mrs.' and not 'Mr.?'"

"I'm as sure as a man can be who hasn't taken any particular notice, sir."

The doubt implied in that last answer decided Midwinter to investigate the matter on the spot. He ascended the house-steps. As he raised his hand to the bell at the side of the door, the violence of his agitation mastered him physically for the moment. A strange sensation as of something leaping up from his heart to his brain, turned his head wildly giddy. He held by the house-railings, and kept his face to the air, and resolutely waited till he was steady again. Then he rang the bell.

"Is?" — he tried to ask for "Mrs. Armadale," when the maid-servant had opened the door, but not even his resolution could force the name to pass his lips, — "Is your mistress at home?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

The girl showed him into a back parlour, and presented him to a little old lady, with an obliging manner and a bright pair of eyes.

"There is some mistake," said Midwinter. "I wished to see —" Once more he tried to utter the name, and once more he failed to force it to his lips.

"Mrs. Armadale?" suggested the little old lady, with a smile.

"Yes."

"Show the gentleman upstairs, Jenny."

The girl led the way to the drawing-room floor.

"Any name, sir?"

"No name."

Mr. Bashwood had barely completed his report of what had happened at the terminus; Mr. Bashwood's

imperious mistress was still sitting speechless under the shock of the discovery that had burst on her — when the door of the room opened; and, without a word of warning to precede him, Midwinter appeared on the threshold. He took one step into the room; and mechanically pushed the door to behind him. He stood in dead silence, and confronted his wife, with a scrutiny that was terrible in its unnatural self-possession, and that enveloped her steadily in one comprehensive look from head to foot.

In dead silence on her side, she rose from her chair. In dead silence she stood erect on the hearth-rug, and faced her husband in widow's weeds.

He took one step nearer to her and stopped again. He lifted his hand and pointed with his lean brown finger at her dress.

"What does that mean?" he asked, without losing his terrible self-possession, and without moving his outstretched hand.

At the sound of his voice, the quick rise and fall of her bosom — which had been the one outward betrayal thus far of the inner agony that tortured her — suddenly stopped. She stood impenetrably silent, breathlessly still — as if his question had struck her dead, and his pointing hand had petrified her.

He advanced one step nearer and reiterated his words, in a voice even lower and quieter than the voice in which he had spoken first.

One moment more of silence, one moment more of inaction might have been the salvation of her. But the fatal force of her character triumphed at the crisis of her destiny, and his. White and still, and haggard and old, she met the dreadful emergency with a dreadful

courage, and spoke the irrevocable words which renounced him to his face.

"Mr. Midwinter," she said, in tones unnaturally hard and unnaturally clear, "our acquaintance hardly entitles you to speak to me in that manner." Those were her words. She never lifted her eyes from the ground while she spoke them. When she had done, the last faint vestige of colour in her cheeks faded out.

There was a pause. Still steadily looking at her, he set himself to fix the language she had used to him in his mind. "She calls me 'Mr. Midwinter,'" he said slowly, in a whisper. "She speaks of 'our acquaintance.'" He waited a little and looked round the room. His wandering eyes encountered Mr. Bashwood for the first time. He saw the steward standing near the fireplace, trembling, and watching him.

"I once did you a service," he said; "and you once told me you were not an ungrateful man. Are you grateful enough to answer me if I ask you something?"

He waited a little again. Mr. Bashwood still stood trembling at the fireplace, silently watching him.

"I see you looking at me," he went on. "Is there some change in me that I am not conscious of myself? Am I seeing things that *you* don't see? Am I hearing words that *you* don't hear? Am I looking or speaking like a man out of his senses?"

Again he waited, and again the silence was unbroken. His eyes began to glitter; and the savage blood that he had inherited from his mother rose dark and slow in his ashy cheeks.

"Is that woman," he asked, "the woman whom you once knew, whose name was Miss Gwilt?"

Once more his wife collected her fatal courage. Once more his wife spoke her fatal words.

"You compel me to repeat," she said, "that you are presuming on our acquaintance, and that you are forgetting what is due to me."

He turned upon her, with a savage suddenness which forced a cry of alarm from Mr. Bashwood's lips.

"Are you, or are you not My Wife?" he asked, through his set teeth.

She raised her eyes to his for the first time. Her lost spirit looked at him, steadily defiant, out of the hell of its own despair.

"I am *not* your wife," she said.

He staggered back, with his hands groping for something to hold by like the hands of a man in the dark. He leaned heavily against the wall of the room, and looked at the woman who had slept on his bosom, and who had denied him to his face.

Mr. Bashwood stole panic-stricken to her side. "Go in there!" he whispered, trying to draw her towards the folding doors which led into the next room. "For God's sake be quick! He'll kill you!"

She put the old man back with her hand. She looked at him with a sudden irradiation of her blank face. She answered him with lips that struggled slowly into a frightful smile.

"*Let* him kill me," she said.

As the words passed her lips, he sprang forward from the wall, with a cry that rang through the house. The frenzy of a maddened man flashed at her from his

glassy eyes, and clutched at her in his threatening hands. He came on till he was within arm's length of her — and suddenly stood still. The black flush died out of his face in the instant when he stopped. His eyelids fell, his outstretched hands wavered, and sank helpless. He dropped, as the dead drop. He lay as the dead lie, in the arms of the wife who had denied him.

She knelt on the floor, and rested his head on her knee. She caught the arm of the steward hurrying to help her, with a hand that closed round it like a vice. "Go for a doctor," she said, "and keep the people of the house away till he comes." There was that in her eye, there was that in her voice, which would have warned any man living to obey her in silence. In silence, Mr. Bashwood submitted, and hurried out of the room.

The instant she was alone, she raised him from her knee. With both arms clasped round him, the miserable woman lifted his lifeless face to hers, and rocked him on her bosom in an agony of tenderness beyond all relief in tears, in a passion of remorse beyond all expression in words. In silence she held him to her breast, in silence she devoured his forehead, his cheeks, his lips, with kisses. Not a sound escaped her, till she heard the trampling footsteps outside, hurrying up the stairs. Then a low moan burst from her lips, as she looked her last at him, and lowered his head again to her knee, before the strangers came in.

The landlady and the steward were the first persons whom she saw when the door was opened. The medical man (a surgeon living in the street) followed. The horror and the beauty of her face as she looked

up at him absorbed the surgeon's attention for the moment, to the exclusion of everything else. She had to beckon to him, she had to point to the senseless man, before she could claim his attention for his patient and divert it from herself.

"Is he dead?" she asked.

The surgeon carried Midwinter to the sofa, and ordered the windows to be opened. "It is a fainting fit," he said; "nothing more."

At that answer her strength failed her for the first time. She drew a deep breath of relief, and leaned on the chimney-piece for support. Mr. Bashwood was the only person present who noticed that she was overcome. He led her to the opposite end of the room, where there was an easy chair — leaving the landlady to hand the restoratives to the surgeon as they were wanted.

"Are you going to wait here till he recovers?" whispered the steward, looking towards the sofa, and trembling as he looked.

The question roused her to a sense of her position — to a knowledge of the merciless necessities which that position now forced her to confront. With a heavy sigh she looked towards the sofa, considered with herself for a moment, and answered Mr. Bashwood's inquiry by a question on her side.

"Is the cab that brought you here from the railway still at the door?"

"Yes."

"Drive at once to the gates of the Sanatorium, and wait there till I join you."

Mr. Bashwood hesitated. She lifted her eyes to his, and, with a look, sent him out of the room.

"The gentleman is coming to, ma'am," said the

landlady, as the steward closed the door. "He has just breathed again."

She bowed in mute reply, rose, and considered with herself once more — looked towards the sofa for the second time — then passed through the folding-doors into her own room.

After a short lapse of time the surgeon drew back from the sofa, and motioned to the landlady to stand aside. The bodily recovery of the patient was assured. There was nothing to be done now but to wait, and let his mind slowly recall its sense of what had happened.

"Where is she?" were the first words he said to the surgeon and the landlady anxiously watching him.

The landlady knocked at the folding-doors, and received no answer. She went in, and found the room empty. A sheet of notepaper was on the dressing-table, with the doctor's fee placed on it. The paper contained these lines, evidently written in great agitation or in great haste: — "It is impossible for me to remain here to-night, after what has happened. I will return to-morrow to take away my luggage, and to pay what I owe you."

"Where is she?" Midwinter asked again, when the landlady returned alone to the drawing-room.

"Gone, sir."

"I don't believe it!"

The old lady's colour rose. "If you know her handwriting, sir," she answered, handing him the sheet of note-paper, "perhaps you may believe *that?*"

He looked at the paper. "I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, as he handed it back. "I beg your pardon, with all my heart."

There was something in his face as he spoke those words which more than soothed the old lady's irritation — it touched her with a sudden pity for the man who had offended her. "I am afraid there is some dreadful trouble, sir, at the bottom of all this," she said simply. "Do you wish me to give any message to the lady when she comes back?"

Midwinter rose, and steadied himself for a moment against the sofa. "I will bring my own message to-morrow," he said. "I must see her before she leaves your house."

The surgeon accompanied his patient into the street. "Can I see you home?" he said, kindly. "You had better not walk, if it is far. You mustn't over-exert yourself; you mustn't catch a chill this cold night."

Midwinter took his hand and thanked him. "I have been used to hard walking and to cold nights, sir," he said; "and I am not easily worn out, even when I look so broken as I do now. If you will tell me the nearest way out of these streets, I think the quiet of the country and the quiet of the night will help me. I have something serious to do to-morrow," he added, in a lower tone; "and I can't rest or sleep till I have thought over it to-night."

The surgeon understood that he had no common man to deal with. He gave the necessary directions without any further remark, and parted with his patient at his own door.

Left by himself, Midwinter paused and looked up at the heaven in silence. The night had cleared, and the stars were out — the stars which he had first learnt to know from his gipsy master on the hill-side. For

the first time his mind went back regretfully to his boyish days. "Oh, for the old life!" he thought, longingly. "I never knew till now how happy the old life was!"

He roused himself and went on towards the open country. His face darkened as he left the streets behind him and advanced into the solitude and obscurity that lay beyond.

"She has denied her husband to-night," he said. "She shall know her master to-morrow."

CHAPTER III.

The Purple Flask.

THE cab was waiting at the gates as Miss Gwilt approached the Sanatorium. Mr. Bashwood got out and advanced to meet her. She took his arm and led him aside a few steps, out of the cabman's hearing.

"Think what you like of me," she said, keeping her thick black veil down over her face — "but don't speak to me to-night. Drive back to your hotel as if nothing had happened. Meet the tidal train to-morrow as usual; and come to me afterwards at the Sanatorium. Go without a word, and I shall believe there is one man in the world who really loves me. Stay and ask questions, and I shall bid you good-by at once and for ever!"

She pointed to the cab. In a minute more it had left the Sanatorium and was taking Mr. Bashwood back to his hotel.

She opened the iron gate and walked slowly up to the house door. A shudder ran through her as she

rang the bell. She laughed bitterly. "Shivering again!" she said to herself. "Who would have thought I had so much feeling left in me?

For once in his life the doctor's face told the truth, when the study door opened between ten and eleven at night, and Miss Gwilt entered the room.

"Mercy on me!" he exclaimed, with a look of the blankest bewilderment, "what does this mean?"

"It means," she answered, "that I have decided to-night instead of deciding to-morrow. You, who know women so well, ought to know that they act on impulse. I am here on an impulse. Take me or leave me, just as you like."

"Take you or leave you?" repeated the doctor, recovering his presence of mind. "My dear lady, what a dreadful way of putting it! Your room shall be got ready instantly! Where is your luggage? Will you let me send for it? No? You can do without your luggage to-night? What admirable fortitude! You will fetch it yourself to-morrow? What extraordinary independence! Do take off your bonnet. Do draw in to the fire. What can I offer you?"

"Offer me the strongest sleeping draught you ever made in your life," she replied. "And leave me alone till the time comes to take it. I shall be your patient in earnest!" she added fiercely as the doctor attempted to remonstrate. "I shall be the maddest of the mad if you irritate me to-night!"

The Principal of the Sanatorium became gravely and briefly professional in an instant.

"Sit down in that dark corner," he said. "Not a soul shall disturb you. In half an hour you will find your room ready, and your sleeping-draught on the

table." "It's been a harder struggle for her than I anticipated," he thought, as he left the room, and crossed to his Dispensary on the opposite side of the hall. "Good heavens, what business has *she* with a conscience, after such a life as hers has been!"

The Dispensary was elaborately fitted up with all the latest improvements in medical furniture. But one of the four walls of the room was unoccupied by shelves, and here the vacant space was filled by a handsome antique cabinet of carved wood, curiously out of harmony, as an object, with the unornamented utilitarian aspect of the place generally. On either side of the cabinet two speaking-tubes were inserted in the wall, communicating with the upper regions of the house, and labelled respectively, "Resident Dispenser," and "Head Nurse." Into the second of these tubes the doctor spoke, on entering the room. An elderly woman appeared, took her orders for preparing Mrs. Armadale's bedchamber, curtseyed, and retired.

Left alone again in the Dispensary, the doctor unlocked the centre compartment of the cabinet, and disclosed a collection of bottles inside, containing the various poisons used in medicine. After taking out the laudanum wanted for the sleeping-draught, and placing it on the dispensary table, he went back to the cabinet — looked into it for a little while — shook his head doubtfully — and crossed to the open shelves on the opposite side of the room. Here, after more consideration, he took down one out of the row of large chemical bottles before him, filled with a yellow liquid: placing the bottle on the table, he returned to the cabinet, and opened a side compartment, containing some specimens of Bohemian glass-work. After mea-

suring it with his eye, he took from the specimens a handsome purple flask, high and narrow in form, and closed by a glass stopper. This he filled with the yellow liquid, leaving a small quantity only at the bottom of the bottle, and locking up the flask again in the place from which he had taken it. The bottle was next restored to its place, after having been filled up with water from the cistern in the Dispensary, mixed with certain chemical liquids in small quantities, which restored it (so far as appearances went) to the condition in which it had been when it was first removed from the shelf. Having completed these mysterious proceedings, the doctor laughed softly, and went back to his speaking-tubes to summon the Resident Dispenser next.

The Resident Dispenser made his appearance shrouded in the necessary white apron from his waist to his feet. The doctor solemnly wrote a prescription for a composing draught, and handed it to his assistant.

"Wanted immediately, Benjamin," he said, in a soft and melancholy voice. "A lady-patient — Mrs. Armadale, Room Number-one, Second-floor. Ah, dear, dear!" groaned the doctor absently; "an anxious case, Benjamin — an anxious case." He opened the bran-new ledger of the establishment, and entered the Case at full length, with a brief abstract of the prescription. "Have you done with the laudanum? Put it back, and lock the cabinet, and give me the key. Is the draught ready? Label it 'to be taken at bed-time,' and give it to the nurse, Benjamin — give it to the nurse."

While the doctor's lips were issuing these direc-

tions, the doctor's hands were occupied in opening a drawer under the desk on which the ledger was placed. He took out some gaily-printed cards of admission "to view the Sanatorium, between the hours of two and and four, P.M.," and filled them up with the date of the next day, "December tenth." When a dozen of the cards had been wrapped up in a dozen lithographed letters of invitation, and enclosed in a dozen envelopes, he next consulted a list of the families resident in the neighbourhood, and directed the envelopes from the list. Ringing a bell this time, instead of speaking through a tube, he summoned the manservant, and gave him the letters, to be delivered by hand the first thing the next morning. "I think it will do," said the doctor, taking a turn in the Dispensary when the servant had gone out; "I think it will do." While he was still absorbed in his own reflections the nurse reappeared to announce that the lady's room was ready; and the doctor thereupon formally returned to the study to communicate the information to Miss Gwilt.

She had not moved since he left her. She rose from her dark corner when he made his announcement, and, without speaking or raising her veil, glided out of the room like a ghost.

After a brief interval, the nurse came downstairs again, with a word for her master's private ear.

"The lady has ordered me to call her to-morrow at seven o'clock, sir," she said. "She means to fetch her luggage herself, and she wants to have a cab at the door as soon as she is dressed. What am I to do?"

"Do what the lady tells you," said the doctor. "She may be safely trusted to return to the Sanatorium."

The breakfast hour at the Sanatorium was half-past eight o'clock. By that time Miss Gwilt had settled everything at her lodgings, and had returned with her luggage in her own possession. The doctor was quite amazed at the promptitude of his patient.

"Why waste so much energy?" he asked, when they met at the breakfast-table. "Why be in such a hurry, my dear lady, when you had all the morning before you?"

"Mere restlessness!" she said, briefly. "The longer I live, the more impatient I get."

The doctor, who had noticed before she spoke that her face looked strangely pale and old that morning, observed when she answered him that her expression — naturally mobile in no ordinary degree — remained quite unaltered by the effort of speaking. There was none of the usual animation on her lips, none of the usual temper in her eyes. He had never seen her so impenetrably and coldly composed as he saw her now. "She has made up her mind at last," he thought. "I may say to her this morning, what I couldn't say to her last night."

He prefaced the coming remarks by a warning look at her widow's dress.

"Now you have got your luggage," he began gravely, "permit me to suggest putting that cap away, and wearing another gown."

"Why?"

"Do you remember what you told me, a day or two since?" asked the doctor. "You said there was a chance of Mr. Armadale's dying in my Sanatorium?"

"I will say it again, if you like."

"A more unlikely chance," pursued the doctor, deaf as ever to all awkward interruptions, "it is hardly possible to imagine! But as long as it *is* a chance at all, it is worth considering. Say then that he dies, — suddenly and unexpectedly, and makes a Coroner's Inquest necessary in the house. What is our course in that case? Our course is to preserve the characters to which we have committed ourselves — you as his widow, and I as the witness of your marriage — and, *in* those characters, to court the fullest inquiry. In the entirely improbable event of his dying just when we want him to die, my idea — I might even say, my resolution — is, to admit that we knew of his resurrection from the sea; and to acknowledge that we instructed Mr. Bashwood to entrap him into this house, by means of a false statement about Miss Milroy. When the inevitable questions follow, I propose to assert that he exhibited symptoms of mental alienation shortly after your marriage — that his delusion consisted in denying that you were his wife, and in declaring that he was engaged to be married to Miss Milroy — that you were in such terror of him on this account, when you heard he was alive and coming back, as to be in a state of nervous agitation that required my care — that at your request, and to calm that nervous agitation, I saw him professionally, and got him quietly into the house by a humouring of his delusion perfectly justifiable in such a case — and lastly, that I can certify his brain to have been affected by one of those mysterious disorders, eminently incurable, eminently fatal, in relation to which medical science is still in the dark. Such a course as this (in the remotely possible event which we are now supposing) would be, in your

interests and mine, unquestionably the right course to take — and such a dress as *that* is, just as certainly, under existing circumstances, the wrong dress to wear."

"Shall I take it off at once?" she asked, rising from the breakfast-table, without a word of remark on what had just been said to her.

"Any time before two o'clock to-day, will do," said the doctor.

She looked at him, with a languid curiosity — nothing more. "Why before two?" she inquired.

"Because this is one of my 'Visitors' Days.' And the Visitors' time is from two to four."

"What have I to do with your visitors?"

"Simply this. I think it important that perfectly respectable and perfectly disinterested witnesses should see you, in my house, in the character of a lady who has come to consult me."

"Your motive seems rather far-fetched. Is it the only motive you have in the matter?"

"My dear, dear lady!" remonstrated the doctor; "have I any concealments from *you?* Surely, you ought to know me better than that?"

"Yes," she said, with a weary contempt. "It's dull enough of me not to understand you by this time. — Send word upstairs, when I am wanted." She left him, and went back to her room.

Two o'clock came; and in a quarter of an hour afterwards the Visitors had arrived. Short as the notice had been, cheerless as the Sanatorium looked to spectators from without, the doctor's invitations had been largely accepted nevertheless by the female members of the families whom he had addressed. In the miserable

monotony of the lives led by a large section of the middle classes of England, anything is welcome to the women which offers them any sort of harmless refuge from the established tyranny of the principle that all human happiness begins and ends at home. While the imperious needs of a commercial country limited the representatives of the male sex, among the doctor's visitors, to one feeble old man and one sleepy little boy, the women, poor souls, to the number of no less than sixteen — old and young, married and single — had seized the golden opportunity of a plunge into public life. Harmoniously united by the two common objects which they all had in view — in the first place to look at each other, and in the second place, to look at the Sanatorium — they streamed in neatly dressed procession through the doctor's dreary iron gates, with a thin varnish over them of assumed superiority to all unladylike excitement, most significant and most pitiable to see!

The proprietor of the Sanatorium received his visitors in the hall with Miss Gwilt on his arm. The hungry eyes of every woman in the company overlooked the doctor as if no such person had existed; and, fixing on the strange lady, devoured her from head to foot in an instant.

"My First Inmate," said the doctor, presenting Miss Gwilt. "This lady only arrived late last night; and she takes the present opportunity (the only one my morning's engagements have allowed me to give her) of going over the Sanatorium. — Allow me, ma'am," he went on, releasing Miss Gwilt, and giving his arm to the eldest lady among the visitors. "Shattered nerves — domestic anxiety," he whispered confiden-

tially. "Sweet woman! sad case!" He sighed softly, and led the old lady across the hall.

The flock of visitors followed; Miss Gwilt accompanying them in silence, and walking alone — among them, but not of them — the last of all.

"The grounds, ladies and gentlemen;" said the doctor, wheeling round and addressing his audience, from the foot of the stairs, "are, as you have seen, in a partially unfinished condition. Under any circumstances, I should lay little stress on the grounds, having Hampstead Heath so near at hand, and carriage-exercise and horse-exercise being parts of my System. In a lesser degree it is also necessary for me to ask your indulgence for the basement floor, on which we now stand. The waiting-room and study on that side, and the Dispensary on the other (to which I shall presently ask your attention), are completed. But the large drawing-room is still in the decorator's hands. In that room (when the walls are dry — not a moment before) my inmates will assemble for cheerful society. Nothing will be spared that can improve, elevate, and adorn life, at these happy little gatherings. Every evening, for example, there will be music for those who like it."

At this point there was a faint stir among the visitors. A mother of a family interrupted the doctor. She begged to know whether music "every evening" included Sunday evening; and, if so, what music was performed?

"Sacred music, of course, ma'am," said the doctor. "Händel on Sunday evening — and Haydn occasionally, when not too cheerful. But, as I was about to say, music is not the only entertainment offered to my

nervous inmates. Amusing reading is provided for those who prefer books."

There was another stir among the visitors. Another mother of a family wished to know whether amusing reading meant novels.

"Only such novels as I have selected and perused myself, in the first instance," said the doctor. "Nothing painful, ma'am! There may be plenty that is painful in real life — but for that very reason, we don't want it in books. The English novelist who enters my house (no foreign novelist will be admitted) must understand his art as the healthy-minded English reader understands it in our time. He must know that our purer modern taste, our higher modern morality, limits him to doing exactly two things for us, when he writes us a book. All we want of him is — occasionally to make us laugh; and invariably to make us comfortable."

There was a third stir among the visitors — caused plainly this time, by approval of the sentiments which they had just heard. The doctor, wisely cautious of disturbing the favourable impression that he had produced, dropped the subject of the drawing-room, and led the way upstairs. As before, the company followed — and, as before, Miss Gwilt walked silently behind them, last of all. One after another, the ladies looked at her with the idea of speaking, and saw something in her face, utterly unintelligible to them, which checked the well-meant words on their lips. The prevalent impression was, that the Principal of the Sanatorium had been delicately concealing the truth, and that his first inmate was mad.

The doctor led the way — with intervals of breath-

ing-time accorded to the old lady on his arm — straight to the top of the house. Having collected his visitors in the corridor, and having waved his hand indicatively at the numbered doors opening out of it on either side, he invited the company to look into any or all of the rooms at their own pleasure.

"Numbers one to four, ladies and gentlemen," said the doctor, "include the dormitories of the attendants. Numbers four to eight are rooms intended for the accommodation of the poorer class of patients whom I receive on terms which simply cover my expenditure — nothing more. In the cases of these poorer persons among my suffering fellow-creatures, personal piety and the recommendation of two clergymen are indispensable to admission. Those are the only conditions I make; but those I insist on. Pray observe that the rooms are all ventilated, and the bedsteads all iron; and kindly notice as we descend again to the second floor, that there is a door shutting off all communication between the second story and the top story, when necessary. The rooms on the second floor, which we have now reached, are (with the exception of my own room) entirely devoted to the reception of lady-inmates — experience having convinced me that the greater sensitiveness of the female constitution necessitates the higher position of the sleeping apartment, with a view to the greater purity and freer circulation of the air. Here the ladies are established immediately under my care, while my assistant-physician (whom I expect to arrive in a week's time) looks after the gentlemen on the floor beneath. Observe, again, as we descend to this lower, or first floor, a second door, closing all communication at night between the two

stories to every one but the assistant-physician and myself. And now that we have reached the gentlemen's part of the house, and that you have observed for yourselves the regulations of the establishment, permit me to introduce you to a specimen of my system of treatment next. I can exemplify it practically, by introducing you to a room fitted up, under my own directions, for the accommodation of the most complicated cases of nervous suffering and nervous delusion that can come under my care."

He threw open the door of a room at one extremity of the corridor, numbered Four. "Look in, ladies and gentlemen," he said; "and, if you see anything remarkable, pray mention it."

The room was not very large, but it was well lit by one broad window. Comfortably furnished as a bedroom, it was only remarkable among other rooms of the same sort, in one way. It had no fireplace. The visitors having noticed this, were informed that the room was warmed in winter by means of hot-water; and were then invited back again into the corridor, to make the discoveries, under professional direction, which they were unable to make for themselves.

"A word, ladies and gentlemen," said the doctor; "literally a word, on nervous derangement first. What is the process of treatment, when, let us say, mental anxiety has broken you down, and you apply to your doctor? He sees you, hears you, and gives you two prescriptions. One is written on paper, and made up at the chemist's. The other is administered by word of mouth, at the propitious moment when the fee is ready; and consists in a general recommendation to you to keep your mind easy. That excellent advice

given, your doctor leaves you to spare yourself all earthly annoyances by your own unaided efforts, until he calls again. Here, my System steps in, and helps you! When *I* see the necessity of keeping your mind easy, I take the bull by the horns and do it for you. I place you in a sphere of action in which the ten thousand trifles which must, and do, irritate nervous people at home, are expressly considered and provided against. I throw up impregnable moral entrenchments between Worry and You. Find a door banging in *this* house, if you can! Catch a servant in *this* house, rattling the tea-things when he takes away the tray! Discover barking dogs, crowing cocks, hammering workmen, screeching children *here* — and I engage to close My Sanatorium to-morrow! Are these nuisances laughing matters to nervous people? Ask them! Can they escape these nuisances at home? Ask them! Will ten minutes' irritation from a barking dog or a screeching child, undo every atom of good done to a nervous sufferer by a month's medical treatment? There isn't a competent doctor in England who will venture to deny it! On those plain grounds my System is based. I assert the medical treatment of nervous suffering to be entirely subsidiary to the moral treatment of it. That moral treatment of it, you find here. That moral treatment, sedulously pursued throughout the day, follows the sufferer into his room at night; and soothes, helps, and cures him, without his own knowledge — you shall see how."

The doctor paused to take breath; and looked for the first time since the visitors had entered the house, at Miss Gwilt. For the first time, on her side, she stepped forward among the audience, and looked at

him in return. After a momentary obstruction in the shape of a cough, the doctor went on.

"Say, ladies and gentlemen," he proceeded, "that my patient has just come in. His mind is one mass of nervous fancies and caprices, which his friends (with the best possible intentions) have been ignorantly irritating at home. They have been afraid of him, for instance, at night. They have forced him to have somebody to sleep in the room with him, or, they have forbidden him, in case of accidents, to lock his door. He comes to me the first night, and says, 'Mind, I won't have anybody in my room!' — 'Certainly not!' — 'I insist on locking my door.' — 'By all means!' In he goes, and locks his door; and there he is, soothed and quieted, predisposed to confidence, predisposed to sleep, by having his own way. 'This is all very well,' you may say; 'but suppose something happens, suppose he has a fit in the night, what then?' You shall see! Hullo, my young friend!" cried the doctor, suddenly addressing the sleepy little boy. "Let's have a game. You shall be the poor sick man, and I'll be the good doctor. Go into that room, and lock the door. There's a brave boy! Have you locked it? Very good. Do you think I can't get at you if I like? I wait till you're asleep, — I press this little white button, hidden here in the stencilled pattern of the outer wall — the mortice of the lock inside falls back silently against the door-post — and I walk into the room whenever I like. The same plan is pursued with the window. My capricious patient won't open it at night, when he ought. I humour him again. 'Shut it, dear sir, by all means!' As soon as he is asleep, I pull the black handle hidden here, in the corner of

the wall. The window of the room inside noiselessly opens, as you see. Say the patient's caprice is the other way — he persists in opening the window when he ought to shut it. Let him! by all means let him! I pull a second handle when he is snug in his bed, and the window noiselessly closes in a moment. Nothing to irritate him, ladies and gentlemen — absolutely nothing to irritate him! But I haven't done with him yet. Epidemic disease, in spite of all my precautions, may enter this Sanatorium, and may render the purifying of the sick-room necessary. Or the patient's case may be complicated by other than nervous malady — say, for instance, asthmatic difficulty of breathing. In the one case, fumigation is necessary: in the other, additional oxygen in the air will give relief. The epidemic nervous patient says, 'I won't be smoked under my own nose!" The asthmatic nervous patient gasps with terror at the idea of a chemical explosion in his room. I noiselessly fumigate one of them; I noiselessly oxygenize the other, by means of a simple Apparatus fixed outside in the corner here. It is protected by this wooden casing; it is locked with my own key; and it communicates by means of a tube with the interior of the room. Look at it!"

With a preliminary glance at Miss Gwilt, the doctor unlocked the lid of the wooden casing, and disclosed inside nothing more remarkable than a large stone jar, having a glass funnel, and a pipe communicating with the wall, inserted in the cork which closed the mouth of it. With another look at Miss Gwilt, the doctor locked the lid again, and asked in the blandest manner, whether his System was intelligible now?

"I might introduce you to all sorts of other contrivances of the same kind," he resumed, leading the way downstairs — "but it would be only the same thing over and over again. A nervous patient who always has his own way, is a nervous patient who is never worried — and a nervous patient who is never worried, is a nervous patient cured. There it is in a nutshell! — Come and see the Dispensary, ladies; the Dispensary and the kitchen next!"

Once more, Miss Gwilt dropped behind the visitors, and waited alone — looking steadfastly at the Room which the doctor had opened, and at the Apparatus which the doctor had unlocked. Again, without a word passing between them, she had understood him. She knew as well as if he had confessed it, that he was craftily putting the necessary temptation in her way, before witnesses who could speak to the superficially-innocent acts which they had seen, if anything serious happened. The Apparatus, originally constructed to serve the purpose of the doctor's medical crotchets, was evidently to be put to some other use, of which the doctor himself had probably never dreamed till now. And the chances were that before the day was over, that other use would be privately revealed to her at the right moment, in the presence of the right witness. "Armadale will die this time," she said to herself as she went slowly down the stairs. "The doctor will kill him, by my hands."

The visitors were in the Dispensary when she joined them. All the ladies were admiring the beauty of the antique cabinet; and, as a necessary consequence, all the ladies were desirous of seeing what was inside. The doctor — after a preliminary look at Miss Gwilt — good-

humouredly shook his head. "There is nothing to interest you inside," he said. "Nothing but rows of little shabby bottles containing the poisons used in medicine which I keep under lock and key. Come to the kitchen, ladies, and honour me with your advice on domestic matters below stairs." He glanced again at Miss Gwilt as the company crossed the hall, with a look which said plainly, "Wait here."

In another quarter-of-an-hour, the doctor had expounded his views on cookery and diet, and the visitors (duly furnished with prospectuses) were taking leave of him at the door. "Quite an intellectual treat!" they said to each other, as they streamed out again in neatly-dressed procession through the iron gates. "And what a very superior man!"

The doctor turned back to the Dispensary, humming absently to himself, and failing entirely to observe the corner of the hall in which Miss Gwilt stood retired. After an instant's hesitation, she followed him. The assistant was in the room when she entered it — summoned by his employer the moment before.

"Doctor," she said, coldly and mechanically, as if she was repeating a lesson; "I am as curious as the other ladies about that pretty cabinet of yours. Now they are all gone, won't you show the inside of it to *me?*"

The doctor laughed in his pleasantest manner.

"The old story," he said. "Blue-Beard's locked chamber, and female curiosity! (Don't go, Benjamin, don't go.) My dear lady, what interest can you possibly have in looking at a medical bottle, simply because it happens to be a bottle of poison?"

She repeated her lesson for the second time.

"I have the interest of looking at it," she said, "and of thinking if it got into some people's hands, of the terrible things it might do."

The doctor glanced at his assistant with a compassionate smile.

"Curious, Benjamin," he said; "the romantic view taken of these drugs of ours by the unscientific mind. My dear lady," he added, turning again to Miss Gwilt, "if *that* is the interest you attach to looking at poisons, you needn't ask me to unlock my cabinet — you need only look about you round the shelves of this room. There are áll sorts of medical liquids and substances in those bottles — most innocent, most useful in themselves — which, in combination with other substances and other liquids, become poisons as terrible and as deadly as any that I have in my cabinet under lock and key."

She looked at him for a moment, and crossed to the opposite side of the room.

"Show me one," she said.

Still smiling as good-humouredly as ever, the doctor humoured his nervous patient. He pointed to the bottle from which he had privately removed the yellow liquid on the previous day, and which he had filled up again with a carefully-coloured imitation, in the shape of a mixture of his own.

"Do you see that bottle?" he said; "that plump, round, comfortable-looking bottle? Never mind the name of what is inside it; let us stick to the bottle, and distinguish it, if you like, by giving it a name of our own. Suppose we call it 'our Stout Friend?' Very good. Our Stout Friend, by himself, is a most harmless and useful medicine. He is freely dispensed every

day to tens of thousands of patients all over the civilized world. He has made no romantic appearances in courts of law; he has excited no breathless interest in novels; he has played no terrifying part on the stage. There he is, an innocent, inoffensive creature, who troubles nobody with the responsibility of locking him up! *But* bring him into contact with something else — introduce him to the acquaintance of a certain common mineral Substance, of a universally accessible kind, broken into fragments; provide yourself with (say) six doses of our Stout Friend, and pour those doses consecutively on the fragments I have mentioned, at intervals of not less than five minutes. Quantities of little bubbles will rise at every pouring; collect the gas in those bubbles; and convey it into a closed chamber — and let Samson himself be in that closed chamber, our Stout Friend will kill him in half-an-hour! Will kill him slowly, without his seeing anything, without his smelling anything, without his feeling anything but sleepiness. Will kill him, and tell the whole College of Surgeons nothing, if they examine him after death, but that he died of apoplexy or congestion of the lungs! What do you think of *that*, my dear lady, in the way of mystery and romance? Is our harmless Stout Friend as interesting *now* as if he rejoiced in the terrible popular fame of the Arsenic and the Strychnine which I keep locked up there? Don't suppose I am exaggerating! Don't suppose I'm inventing a story to put you off with, as the children say. Ask Benjamin, there," said the doctor, appealing to his assistant, with his eyes fixed on Miss Gwilt. "Ask Benjamin," he repeated, with the steadiest emphasis on the next words, "if six doses from that bottle, at intervals of five minutes each,

would not, under the conditions I have stated, produce the results I have described?"

The Resident Dispenser, modestly admiring Miss Gwilt at a distance, started and coloured up. He was plainly gratified by the little attention which had included him in the conversation.

"The doctor is quite right, ma'am," he said, addressing Miss Gwilt, with his best bow, "the production of the gas, extended over half an hour, would be quite gradual enough. And," added the Dispenser, silently appealing to his employer to let him exhibit a little chemical knowledge on his own account, "the volume of the gas would be sufficient at the end of the time — if I am not mistaken, sir? — to be fatal to any person entering the room, in less than five minutes."

"Unquestionably, Benjamin," rejoined the doctor. "But I think we have had enough of chemistry for the present," he added, turning to Miss Gwilt. "With every desire, my dear lady, to gratify every passing wish you may form, I venture to propose trying a more cheerful subject. Suppose we leave the Dispensary, before it suggests any more inquiries to that active mind of yours? No? You want to see an experiment? You want to see how the little bubbles are made? Well, well! there is no harm in that. We will let Mrs. Armadale see the bubbles," continued the doctor, in the tone of a parent humouring a spoilt child. "Try if you can find a few of those fragments that we want, Benjamin. I daresay the workmen (slovenly fellows!) have left something of the sort about the house or the grounds."

The Resident Dispenser left the room.

As soon as his back was turned, the doctor began

opening and shutting drawers in various parts of the dispensary, with the air of a man who wants something in a hurry, and doesn't know where to find it. "Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, suddenly stopping at the drawer from which he had taken his cards of invitation on the previous day, "what's this? A key? A duplicate key, as I'm alive, of my fumigating Apparatus upstairs! Oh dear, dear, how careless I get," said the doctor, turning round briskly to Miss Gwilt. "I hadn't the least idea that I possessed this second key. I should never have missed it. I do assure you I should never have missed it, if anybody had taken it out of the drawer!" He bustled away to the other end of the room — without closing the drawer, and without taking away the duplicate key.

In silence, Miss Gwilt listened till he had done. In silence, she glided to the drawer. In silence, she took the key and hid it in her apron pocket.

The Dispenser came back, with the fragments required of him, collected in a basin. "Thank you, Benjamin," said the doctor. "Kindly cover them with water, while I get the bottle down."

As accidents sometimes happen in the most perfectly regulated families, so clumsiness sometimes possesses itself of the most perfectly-disciplined hands. In the process of its transfer from the shelf to the doctor, the bottle slipped, and fell smashed to pieces on the floor.

"Oh, my fingers and thumbs!" cried the doctor, with an air of comic vexation, "what in the world do you mean by playing me such a wicked trick as that? Well, well, well — it can't be helped. Have we got any more of it, Benjamin?"

"Not a drop, sir."

"Not a drop!" echoed the doctor. "My dear madam, what excuses can I offer you? My clumsiness has made our little experiment impossible for to-day. Remind me to order some more to-morrow, Benjamin — and don't think of troubling yourself to put that mess to rights. I'll send the man here to mop it all up. Our Stout Friend is harmless enough now, my dear lady — in combination with a boarded floor and a coming mop! I'm so sorry; I really am so sorry to have disappointed you." With those soothing words, he offered his arm, and led Miss Gwilt out of the dispensary.

"Have you done with me for the present?" she asked when they were in the hall.

"Oh dear, dear, what a way of putting it!" exclaimed the doctor. "Dinner at six," he added with his politest emphasis, as she turned from him in disdainful silence, and slowly mounted the stairs to her own room.

A clock of the noiseless sort — incapable of offending irritable nerves — was fixed in the wall, above the first-floor landing, at the Sanatorium. At the moment when the hands pointed to a quarter before six, the silence of the lonely upper regions was softly broken by the rustling of Miss Gwilt's dress. She advanced along the corridor of the first-floor — paused at the covered Apparatus fixed outside the room numbered Four — listened for a moment — and then unlocked the cover with the duplicate key.

The open lid cast a shadow over the inside of the casing. All she saw at first, was what she had seen already — the jar, and the pipe and glass funnel in-

serted in the cork. She removed the funnel; and, looking about her, observed on the window-sill close by, a wax-tipped wand used for lighting the gas. She took the wand, and, introducing it through the aperture occupied by the funnel, moved it to and fro in the jar. The faint splash of some liquid, and the grating noise of certain hard substances which she was stirring about, were the two sounds that caught her ear. She drew out the wand, and cautiously touched the wet left on it with the tip of her tongue. Caution was quite needless in this case. The liquid was — water.

In putting the funnel back in its place, she noticed something faintly shining in the obscurely-lit vacant space at the side of the jar. She drew it out, and produced a Purple Flask. The liquid with which it was filled showed dark through the transparent colouring of the glass; and, fastened at regular intervals down one side of the Flask, were six thin strips of paper which divided the contents into six equal parts.

There was no doubt now, that the Apparatus had been secretly prepared for her — the Apparatus of which she alone (besides the doctor) possessed the key.

She put back the Flask, and locked the cover of the casing. For a moment, she stood looking at it, with the key in her hand. On a sudden, her lost colour came back. On a sudden, its natural animation returned, for the first time that day, to her face. She turned and hurried breathlessly upstairs to her room on the second floor. With eager hands, she snatched her cloak out of the wardrobe, and took her bonnet from the box. "I'm not in prison!" she burst out impetuously. "I've got the use of my limbs! I can

go — no matter where, as long as I am out of this house!"

With her cloak on her shoulders, with her bonnet in her hand, she crossed the room to the door. A moment more — and she would have been out in the passage. In that moment, the remembrance flashed back on her of the husband whom she had denied to his face. She stopped instantly, and threw the cloak and bonnet from her on the bed. "No!" she said. "The gulph is dug between us — the worst is done!"

There was a knock at the door. The doctor's voice outside, politely reminded her that it was six o'clock.

She opened the door, and stopped him on his way downstairs.

"What time is the train due to-night?" she asked in a whisper.

"At ten," answered the doctor, in a voice which all the world might hear, and welcome.

"What room is Mr. Armadale to have when he comes?"

"What room would you like him to have?"

"Number Four."

The doctor kept up appearances to the very last.

"Number Four let it be," he said graciously. "Provided, of course, that Number Four is unoccupied at the time."

* * * * *

The evening wore on, and the night came.

At a few minutes before ten, Mr. Bashwood was again at his post; once more on the watch for the coming of the tidal train.

The inspector on duty, who knew him by sight,

and who had personally ascertained that his regular attendance at the terminus implied no designs on the purses and portmanteaus of the passengers, noticed two new circumstances in connection with Mr. Bashwood that night. In the first place, instead of exhibiting his customary cheerfulness, he looked anxious and depressed. In the second place, while he was watching for the train, he was to all appearance being watched in his turn, by a slim, dark, undersized man, who had left his luggage (marked with the name of Midwinter,) at the custom-house department the evening before, and who had returned to have it examined about half an hour since.

What had brought Midwinter to the terminus? and why was he, too, waiting for the tidal train?

After straying as far as Hendon during his lonely walk of the previous night, he had taken refuge at the village inn, and had fallen asleep (from sheer exhaustion) towards those later hours of the morning, which were the hours that his wife's foresight had turned to account. When he returned to the lodging, the landlady could only inform him that her tenant had settled everything with her, and had left (for what destination neither she nor her servant could tell) more than two hours since.

Having given some little time to inquiries, the result of which convinced him that the clue was lost so far, Midwinter had quitted the house, and had pursued his way mechanically to the busier and more central parts of the metropolis. With the light now thrown on his wife's character, to call at the address she had given him as the address at which her mother lived

would be plainly useless. He went on through the streets, resolute to discover her, and trying vainly to see the means to his end, till the sense of fatigue forced itself on him once more. Stopping to rest and recruit his strength at the first hotel he came to, a chance dispute between the waiter and a stranger about a lost portmanteau reminded him of his own luggage, left at the terminus, and instantly took his mind back to the circumstances under which he and Mr. Bashwood had met. In a moment more, the idea that he had been vainly seeking on his way through the streets flashed on him. In a moment more, he had determined to try the chance of finding the steward again on the watch for the person whose arrival he had evidently expected by the previous evening's train.

Ignorant of the report of Allan's death at sea; uninformed, at the terrible interview with his wife, of the purpose which her assumption of a widow's dress really had in view, Midwinter's first vague suspicions of her fidelity had now inevitably developed into the conviction that she was false. He could place but one interpretation on her open disavowal of him, and on her taking the name under which he had secretly married her. Her conduct forced the conclusion on him that she was engaged in some infamous intrigue; and that she had basely secured herself beforehand in the position of all others in which she knew it would be most odious and most repellent to him to claim his authority over her. With that conviction he was now watching Mr. Bashwood, firmly persuaded that his wife's hiding-place was known to the vile servant of his wife's vices — and darkly suspecting, as the time wore on, that the unknown man who had wronged him, and the un-

known traveller for whose arrival the steward was waiting, were one and the same.

The train was late that night, and the carriages were more than usually crowded when they arrived at last. Midwinter became involved in the confusion on the platform, and in the effort to extricate himself he lost sight of Mr. Bashwood for the first time.

A lapse of some few minutes had passed before he again discovered the steward talking eagerly to a man in a loose shaggy coat, whose back was turned towards him. Forgetful of all the cautions and restraints which he had imposed on himself before the train appeared, Midwinter instantly advanced on them. Mr. Bashwood saw his threatening face as he came on, and fell back in silence. The man in the loose coat turned to look where the steward was looking, and disclosed to Midwinter, in the full light of the station-lamp, Allan's face!

For the moment they both stood speechless, hand in hand, looking at each other. Allan was the first to recover himself.

"Thank God for this!" he said fervently. "I don't ask how you came here — it's enough for me that you have come. Miserable news has met me already, Midwinter. Nobody but you can comfort me, and help me to bear it." His voice faltered over those last words, and he said no more.

The tone in which he had spoken roused Midwinter to meet the circumstances as they were, by appealing to the old grateful interest in his friend which had once been the foremost interest of his life. He mastered his personal misery for the first time since it had

fallen on him, and gently taking Allan aside, asked what had happened.

The answer — after informing him of his friend's reported death at sea — announced (on Mr. Bashwood's authority) that the news had reached Miss Milroy, and that the deplorable result of the shock thus inflicted, had obliged the major to place his daughter in the neighbourhood of London, under medical care.

Before saying a word on his side, Midwinter looked distrustfully behind him. Mr. Bashwood had followed them. Mr. Bashwood was watching to see what they did next.

"Was he waiting your arrival here to tell you this about Miss Milroy?" asked Midwinter, looking back again from the steward to Allan.

"Yes," said Allan. "He has been kindly waiting here, night after night, to meet me, and break the news to me."

Midwinter paused once more. The attempt to reconcile the conclusion he had drawn from his wife's conduct with the discovery that Allan was the man for whose arrival Mr. Bashwood had been waiting, was hopeless. The one present chance of discovering a truer solution of the mystery, was to press the steward on the one available point in which he had laid himself open to attack. He had positively denied on the previous evening that he knew anything of Allan's movements, or that he had any interest in Allan's return to England. Having detected Mr. Bashwood in one lie told to himself, Midwinter instantly suspected him of telling another to Allan. He seized the opportunity of sifting the statement about Miss Milroy on the spot.

"How have you become acquainted with this sad

news?" he inquired, turning suddenly on Mr. Bashwood.

"Through the major of course," said Allan, before the steward could answer.

"Who is the doctor who has the care of Miss Milroy?" persisted Midwinter, still addressing Mr. Bashwood.

For the second time the steward made no reply. For the second time, Allan answered for him.

"He is a man with a foreign name," said Allan. "He keeps a Sanatorium near Hampstead. What did you say the place was called, Mr. Bashwood?"

"Fairweather Vale, sir," said the steward, answering his employer as a matter of necessity, but answering very unwillingly.

The address of the Sanatorium instantly reminded Midwinter that he had traced his wife to Fairweather Vale Villas the previous night. He began to see light through the darkness, dimly, for the first time. The instinct which comes with emergency, before the slower process of reason can assert itself, brought him at a leap to the conclusion that Mr. Bashwood — who had been certainly acting under his wife's influence the previous day — might be acting again under his wife's influence now. He persisted in sifting the steward's statement, with the conviction growing firmer and firmer in his mind that the statement was a lie, and that his wife was concerned in it.

"Is the major in Norfolk?" he asked, "or is he near his daughter in London?"

"In Norfolk," said Mr. Bashwood. Having answered Allan's look of inquiry, instead of Midwinter's spoken question, in those words, he hesitated, looked

Midwinter in the face for the first time, and added, suddenly, "I object, if you please, to be cross-examined, sir. I know what I have told Mr. Armadale, and I know no more."

The words, and the voice in which they were spoken, were alike at variance with Mr. Bashwood's usual language and Mr. Bashwood's usual tone. There was a sullen depression in his face — there was a furtive distrust and dislike in his eyes when they looked at Midwinter, which Midwinter himself now noticed for the first time. Before he could answer the steward's extraordinary outbreak, Allan interfered.

"Don't think me impatient," he said. "But it's getting late; it's a long way to Hampstead. I'm afraid the Sanatorium will be shut up."

Midwinter started. "You are not going to the Sanatorium to-night!" he exclaimed.

Allan took his friend's hand, and wrung it hard. "If you were as fond of her as I am," he whispered, "you would take no rest, you could get no sleep, till you had seen the doctor, and heard the best and the worst he had to tell you. Poor dear little soul! who knows, if she could only see me alive and well —" The tears came into his eyes, and he turned away his head in silence.

Midwinter looked at the steward. "Stand back," he said. "I want to speak to Mr. Armadale." There was something in his eye which it was not safe to trifle with. Mr. Bashwood drew back out of hearing, but not out of sight. Midwinter laid his hand fondly on his friend's shoulder.

"Allan," he said, "I have reasons —" He stopped. Could the reasons be given before he had fairly realized

them himself; at that time, too, and under those circumstances? Impossible! "I have reasons," he resumed, "for advising you not to believe too readily what Mr. Bashwood may say. Don't tell him this, but take the warning."

Allan looked at his friend in astonishment. "It was you who always liked Mr. Bashwood!" he exclaimed. "It was you who trusted him, when he first came to the great house!"

"Perhaps I was wrong, Allan, and perhaps you were right. Will you only wait till we can telegraph to Major Milroy and get his answer? Will you only wait over the night?"

"I shall go mad if I wait over the night," said Allan. "You have made me more anxious than I was before. If I am not to speak about it to Bashwood, I must and will go to the Sanatorium, and find out whether she is or is not there, from the doctor himself."

Midwinter saw that it was useless. In Allan's interests there was only one other course left to take. "Will you let me go with you?" he asked.

Allan's face brightened for the first time. "You dear, good fellow!" he exclaimed. "It was the very thing I was going to beg of you myself."

Midwinter beckoned to the steward. "Mr. Armadale is going to the Sanatorium," he said, "and I mean to accompany him. Get a cab and come with us."

He waited, to see whether Mr. Bashwood would comply. Having been strictly ordered, when Allan did arrive, not to lose sight of him, and having, in his own interests, Midwinter's unexpected appearance to explain to Miss Gwilt, the steward had no choice but

to comply. In sullen submission he did as he had been told. The keys of Allan's baggage were given to the foreign travelling servant whom he had brought with him, and the man was instructed to wait his master's orders at the terminus hotel. In a minute more the cab was on its way out of the station — with Midwinter and Allan inside, and with Mr. Bashwood by the driver on the box.

* * * * *

Between eleven and twelve o'clock that night, Miss Gwilt, standing alone at the window which lit the corridor of the Sanatorium on the second floor, heard the roll of wheels coming towards her. The sound, gathering rapidly in volume through the silence of the lonely neighbourhood, stopped at the iron gates. In another minute she saw the cab draw up beneath her, at the house door.

The earlier night had been cloudy, but the sky was clearing now, and the moon was out. She opened the window to see and hear more clearly. By the light of the moon she saw Allan get out of the cab, and turn round to speak to some other person inside. The answering voice told her, before he appeared in his turn, that Armadale's companion was her husband.

The same petrifying influence that had fallen on her at the interview with him of the previous day, fell on her now. She stood by the window, white and still, and haggard and old — as she had stood when she first faced him in her widow's weeds.

Mr. Bashwood, stealing up alone to the second floor to make his report, knew, the instant he set eyes on her, that the report was needless. "It's not

my fault," was all he said, as she slowly turned her head and looked at him. "They met together, and there was no parting them."

She drew a long breath, and motioned to him to be silent. "Wait a little," she said; "I know all about it."

Turning from him at those words, she slowly paced the corridor to its furthest end; turned, and slowly came back to him with frowning brow and drooping head — with all the grace and beauty gone from her, but the inbred grace and beauty in the movement of her limbs.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" she asked; her mind far away from him, and her eyes looking at him vacantly as she put the question.

He roused his courage as he had never roused it in her presence yet.

"Don't drive me to despair!" he cried, with a startling abruptness. "Don't look at me in that way, now I have found it out!"

"What have you found out?" she asked, with a momentary surprise on her face, which faded from it again before he could gather breath enough to go on.

"Mr. Armadale is not the man who took you away from me," he answered. "Mr. Midwinter is the man. I found it out in your face yesterday. I see it in your face now, Why did you sign your name, 'Armadale' when you wrote to me? Why do you call yourself 'Mrs. Armadale' still?"

He spoke those bold words at long intervals, with an effort to resist her influence over him, pitiable and terrible to see.

She looked at him for the first time with softened eyes. "I wish I had pitied you when we first met," she said gently, "as I pity you now."

He struggled desperately to go on, and say the words to her which he had strung himself to the pitch of saying on the drive from the terminus. They were words which hinted darkly at his knowledge of her past life; words which warned her — do what else she might; commit what crimes she pleased — to think twice before she deceived and deserted him again. In those terms he had vowed to himself to address her. He had the phrases picked and chosen; he had the sentences ranged and ordered in his mind; nothing was wanting but to make the one crowning effort of speaking them — and even now, after all he had said, and all he had dared, the effort was more than he could compass! In helpless gratitude, even for so little as her pity, he stood looking at her, and wept the silent womanish tears that fall from old men's eyes.

She took his hand and spoke to him — with marked forbearance, but without the slightest sign of emotion on her side.

"You have waited already at my request," she said. "Wait till to-morrow, and you will know all. If you trust nothing else that I have told you, you may trust what I tell you now. *It will end to-night.*"

As she said the words, the doctor's step was heard on the stairs. Mr. Bashwood drew back from her, with his heart beating fast in unutterable expectation. "It will end to-night!" he repeated to himself, under his breath, as he moved away towards the far end of the corridor.

"Don't let me disturb you, sir," said the doctor, cheerfully, as they met. "I have nothing to say to Mrs. Armadale but what you or anybody may hear."

Mr. Bashwood went on, without answering, to the far end of the corridor, still repeating to himself, "It will end to-night!" The doctor passing him in the opposite direction, joined Miss Gwilt.

"You have heard, no doubt," he began in his blandest manner and his roundest tones, "that Mr. Armadale has arrived. Permit me to add, my dear lady, that there is not the least reason for any nervous agitation on your part. He has been carefully humoured, and he is as quiet and manageable as his best friends could wish. I have informed him that it is impossible to allow him an interview with the young lady to-night — but that he may count on seeing her (with the proper precautions) at the earliest propitious hour, after she is awake to-morrow morning. As there is no hotel near, and as the propitious hour may occur at a moment's notice, it was clearly incumbent on me, under the peculiar circumstances, to offer him the hospitality of the Sanatorium. He has accepted it with the utmost gratitude; and has thanked me in a most gentlemanly and touching manner for the pains I have taken to set his mind at ease. Perfectly gratifying, perfectly satisfactory, so far! But there has been a little hitch — now happily got over — which I think it right to mention to you before we all retire for the night."

Having paved the way in those words (and in Mr. Bashwood's hearing) for the statement which he had previously announced his intention of making, in the event of Allan's dying in the Sanatorium, the

doctor was about to proceed, when his attention was attracted by a sound below like the trying of a door.

He instantly descended the stairs, and unlocked the door of communication between the first and second floors, which he had locked behind him on his way up. But the person who had tried the door — if such a person there really had been — was too quick for him. He looked along the corridor, and over the staircase into the hall, and discovering nothing, returned to Miss Gwilt, after securing the door of communication behind him once more.

"Pardon me," he resumed, "I thought I heard something down-stairs. With regard to the little hitch that I adverted to just now, permit me to inform you that Mr. Armadale has brought a friend here with him, who bears the strange name of Midwinter. Do you know this gentleman at all?" asked the doctor, with a suspicious anxiety in his eyes, which strangely belied the elaborate indifference of his tone.

"I know him to be an old friend of Mr. Armadale's," she said. "Does he —?" Her voice failed her, and her eyes fell before the doctor's steady scrutiny. She mastered the momentary weakness, and finished her question. "Does he, too, stay here to-night?"

"Mr. Midwinter is a person of coarse manners and suspicious temper," rejoined the doctor, steadily watching her. "He was rude enough to insist on staying here as soon as Mr. Armadale had accepted my invitation."

He paused to note the effect of those words on her. Left utterly in the dark by the caution with

which she had avoided mentioning her husband's assumed name to him at their first interview, the doctor's distrust of her was necessarily of the vaguest kind. He had heard her voice fail her — he had seen her colour change. He suspected her of a mental reservation on the subject of Midwinter — and of nothing more.

"Did you permit him to have his way?" she asked. "In your place, I should have shown him the door."

The impenetrable composure of her tone warned the doctor that her self-command was not to be further shaken that night. He resumed the character of Mrs. Armadale's medical referee on the subject of Mr. Armadale's mental health.

"If I had only had my own feelings to consult," he said, "I don't disguise from you that I should (as you say) have shown Mr. Midwinter the door. But on appealing to Mr. Armadale, I found he was himself anxious not to be parted from his friend. Under those circumstances, but one alternative was left, the alternative of humouring him again. The responsibility of thwarting him — to say nothing," added the doctor, drifting for a moment towards the truth, "of my natural apprehension, with such a temper as his friend's, of a scandal and disturbance in the house — was not to be thought of for a moment. Mr. Midwinter accordingly remains here for the night; and occupies (I ought to say, insists on occupying) the next room to Mr. Armadale. Advise me, my dear madam, in this emergency," concluded the doctor, with his loudest emphasis. "What rooms shall we put them in, on the first floor?"

"Put Mr. Armadale in Number Four."

"And his friend next to him, in number three?" said the doctor. "Well! well! well! perhaps they *are* the most comfortable rooms. I'll give my orders immediately. Don't hurry away, Mr. Bashwood," he called out cheerfully as he reached the top of the staircase. "I have left the assistant-physician's key on the window-sill yonder, and Mrs. Armadale can let you out at the staircase door whenever she pleases. Don't sit up late, Mrs. Armadale! Yours is a nervous system that requires plenty of sleep. 'Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep.' Grand line! God bless you — good-night!"

Mr. Bashwood came back from the far end of the corridor — still pondering, in unutterable expectation, on what was to come with the night.

"Am I to go now?" he asked.

"No. You are to stay. I said you should know all if you waited till the morning. Wait here."

He hesitated and looked about him. "The doctor," he faltered. "I thought the doctor said ——"

"The doctor will interfere with nothing that I do in this house to-night. I tell you to stay. There are empty rooms on the floor above this. Take one of them."

Mr. Bashwood felt the trembling fit coming on him again as he looked at her. "May I ask ——?" he began.

"Ask nothing. I want you."

"Will you please to tell me ——?"

"I will tell you nothing till the night is over and the morning has come."

His curiosity conquered his fear. He persisted.

"Is it something dreadful?" he whispered. "Too dreadful to tell me?"

She stamped her foot with a sudden outbreak of impatience. "Go!" she said, snatching the key of the staircase door from the window-sill. "You do quite right to distrust me — you do quite right to follow me no farther in the dark. Go before the house is shut up. I can do without you." She led the way to the stairs, with the key in one hand, and the candle in the other.

Mr. Bashwood followed her in silence. No one, knowing what he knew of her earlier life, could have failed to perceive that she was a woman driven to the last extremity, and standing consciously on the brink of a Crime. In the first terror of the discovery, he broke free from the hold she had on him — he thought and acted like a man who had a will of his own again.

She put the key in the door, and turned to him before she opened it, with the light of the candle on her face. "Forget me, and forgive me," she said. "We meet no more."

She opened the door, and, standing inside it, after he had passed her, gave him her hand. He had resisted her look, he had resisted her words, but the magnetic fascination of her touch conquered him at the final moment. "I can't leave you!" he said, holding helplessly by the hand she had given him. "What must I do?"

"Come and see," she answered, without allowing him an instant to reflect.

Closing her hand firmly on his, she led him along the first-floor corridor to the room numbered Four.

"Notice that room," she whispered. After a look over the stairs to see that they were alone, she retraced her steps with him to the opposite extremity of the corridor. Here, facing the window which lit the place at the other end, was one little room, with a narrow grating in the higher part of the door, intended for the sleeping-apartment of the doctor's deputy. From the position of this room, the grating commanded a view of the bed-chambers down each side of the corridor, and so enabled the deputy-physician to inform himself of any irregular proceedings on the part of the patients under his care, with little or no chance of being detected in watching them. Miss Gwilt opened the door and led the way into the empty room.

"Wait here," she said, "while I go back upstairs; and lock yourself in, if you like. You will be in the dark — but the gas will be burning in the corridor. Keep at the grating, and make sure that Mr. Armadale goes into the room I have just pointed out to you, and that he doesn't leave it afterwards. If you lose sight of the room for a single moment, before I come back, you will repent it to the end of your life. If you do as I tell you, you shall see me to-morrow, and claim your own reward. Quick with your answer! Is it Yes or No?"

He could make no reply in words. He raised her hand to his lips, and kissed it rapturously. She left him in the room. From his place at the grating he saw her glide down the corridor to the staircase door. She passed through it, and locked it. Then there was silence.

The next sound was the sound of the women-servants' voices. Two of them came up to put the sheets

on the beds in Number Three and Number Four. The women were in high good-humour, laughing and talking to each other through the open doors of the rooms. The master's customers were coming in at last, they said, with a vengeance; the house would soon begin to look cheerful, if things went on like this.

After a little, the beds were got ready, and the women returned to the kitchen-floor, on which the sleeping-rooms of the domestic servants were all situated. Then there was silence again.

The next sound was the sound of the doctor's voice. He appeared at the end of the corridor, showing Allan and Midwinter the way to their rooms. They all went together into Number Four. After a little, the doctor came out first. He waited till Midwinter joined him, and pointed with a formal bow to the door of Number Three. Midwinter entered the room without speaking, and shut himself in. The doctor, left alone, withdrew to the staircase door and unlocked it — then waited in the corridor, whistling to himself softly, under his breath.

Voices pitched cautiously low became audible in a minute more in the hall. The Resident Dispenser and the Head Nurse appeared, on their way to the Dormitories of the Attendants at the top of the house. The man bowed silently, and passed the doctor; the woman curtseyed silently, and followed the man. The doctor acknowledged their salutations by a courteous wave of his hand; and once more left alone, paused a moment, still whistling softly to himself — then walked to the door of Number Four, and opened the case of the fumigating apparatus fixed near it in the corner of the wall. As he lifted the lid and looked in, his whistling

ceased. He took a long purple bottle out, examined it by the gaslight, put it back, and closed the case. This done, he advanced on tiptoe to the open staircase door — passed through it — and secured it on the inner side as usual.

Mr. Bashwood had seen him at the apparatus; Mr. Bashwood had noticed the manner of his withdrawal through the staircase-door. Again the sense of an unutterable expectation throbbed at his heart. A terror that was slow and cold and deadly crept into his hands, and guided them in the dark to the key that had been left for him in the inner side of the door. He turned it in vague distrust of what might happen next, and waited.

The slow minutes passed, and nothing happened. The silence was horrible; the solitude of the lonely corridor was a solitude of invisible treacheries. He began to count to keep his mind employed — to keep his own growing dread away from him. The numbers, as he whispered them, followed each other slowly up to a hundred, and still nothing happened. He had begun the second hundred; he had got on to twenty — when, without a sound to betray that he had been moving in his room, Midwinter suddenly appeared in the corridor.

He stood for a moment and listened — he went to the stairs and looked over into the hall beneath. Then, for the second time that night, he tried the staircase door, and for the second time found it fast. After a moment's reflection, he tried the doors of the bedrooms on his right hand next, looked into one after the other, and saw that they were empty, then came to the door of the end room in which the steward was

concealed. Here again, the lock resisted him. He listened, and looked up at the grating. No sound was to be heard, no light was to be seen inside. "Shall I break the door in," he said to himself, "and make sure? No; it would be giving the doctor an excuse for turning me out of the house." He moved away, and looked into the two empty rooms in the row occupied by Allan and himself, then walked to the window at the staircase end of the corridor. Here, the case of the fumigating apparatus attracted his attention. After trying vainly to open it, his suspicion seemed to be aroused. He searched back along the corridor, and observed that no object of a similar kind appeared outside any of the other bedchambers. Again at the window, he looked again at the apparatus, and turned away from it with a gesture which plainly indicated that he had tried, and failed, to guess what it might be.

Baffled at all points, he still showed no sign of returning to his bedchamber. He stood at the window, with his eyes fixed on the door of Allan's room, thinking. If Mr. Bashwood, furtively watching him through the grating, could have seen him at that moment in the mind as well as in the body, Mr. Bashwood's heart might have throbbed even faster than it was throbbing now, in expectation of the next event which Midwinter's decision of the next minute was to bring forth.

On what was his mind occupied as he stood alone, at the dead of night, in the strange house?

His mind was occupied in drawing its disconnected impressions together, little by little, to one point.

Convinced, from the first, that some hidden danger threatened Allan in the Sanatorium, his distrust — vaguely associated, thus far, with the place itself; with his wife (whom he firmly believed to be now under the same roof with him); with the doctor, who was as plainly in her confidence as Mr. Bashwood himself — now narrowed its range, and centred itself obstinately in Allan's room. Resigning all further effort to connect his suspicion of a conspiracy against his friend, with the outrage which had the day before been offered to himself — an effort which would have led him, if he could have maintained it, to a discovery of the Fraud really contemplated by his wife — his mind, clouded and confused by disturbing influences, instinctively took refuge in its impressions of facts as they had shown themselves, since he had entered the house. Everything that he had noticed below stairs suggested that there was some secret purpose to be answered by getting Allan to sleep in the Sanatorium. Everything that he had noticed above stairs, associated the lurking-place in which the danger lay hid, with Allan's room. To reach this conclusion, and to decide on baffling the conspiracy, whatever it might be, by taking Allan's place, was with Midwinter the work of an instant. Confronted by actual peril, the great nature of the man intuitively freed itself from the weaknesses that had beset it in happier and safer times. Not even the shadow of the old superstition rested on his mind now — no fatalist suspicion of himself disturbed the steady resolution that was in him. The one last doubt that troubled him, as he stood at the window thinking, was the doubt whether he could persuade Allan to change rooms with him, without involving

himself in an explanation which might lead Allan to suspect the truth.

"In the minute that elapsed, while he waited with his eyes on the room, the doubt was resolved — he found the trivial, yet sufficient, excuse of which he was in search. Mr. Bashwood saw him rouse himself, and go to the door. Mr. Bashwood heard him knock softly, and whisper, "Allan, are you in bed?"

"No," answered the voice inside, "come in."

He appeared to be on the point of entering the room, when he checked himself as if he had suddenly remembered something. "Wait a minute," he said, through the door, and, turning away, went straight to the end room. "If there is anybody watching us in there," he said aloud, "let him watch us through this!" He took out his handkerchief, and stuffed it into the wires of the grating, so as completely to close the aperture. Having thus forced the spy inside (if there was one) either to betray himself by moving the handkerchief, or to remain blinded to all view of what might happen next, Midwinter presented himself in Allan's room.

"You know what poor nerves I have," he said, "and what a wretched sleeper I am at the best of times. I can't sleep to-night. The window in my room rattles every time the wind blows. I wish it was as fast as your window here."

"My dear fellow!" cried Allan, "I don't mind a rattling window. Let's change rooms. Nonsense! Why should you make excuses to *me?* Don't I know how easily trifles upset those excitable nerves of yours? Now the doctor has quieted my mind about my poor little Neelie, I begin to feel the journey — and I'll

answer for sleeping anywhere till to-morrow comes." He took up his travelling-bag. "We must be quick about it," he added, pointing to his candle. "They haven't left me much candle to go to bed by."

"Be very quiet, Allan," said Midwinter, opening the door for him. "We mustn't disturb the house at this time of night."

"Yes, yes," returned Allan, in a whisper. "Good night — I hope you'll sleep as well as I shall."

Midwinter saw him into Number Three, and noticed that his own candle (which he had left there) was as short as Allan's. "Good night," he said, and came out again into the corridor.

He went straight to the grating, and looked and listened once more. The handkerchief remained exactly as he had left it, and still there was no sound to be heard within. He returned slowly along the corridor, and thought of the precautions he had taken, for the last time. Was there no other way than the way he was trying now? There was none. Any openly-avowed posture of defence — while the nature of the danger, and the quarter from which it might come, were alike unknown — would be useless in itself, and worse than useless in the consequences which it might produce by putting the people of the house on their guard. Without a fact that could justify to other minds his distrust of what might happen with the night; incapable of shaking Allan's ready faith in the fair outside which the doctor had presented to him, the one safeguard in his friend's interests that Midwinter could set up, was the safeguard of changing the rooms — the one policy he could follow, come what might of it, was the policy of waiting for events. "I can trust to one thing," he

said to himself, as he looked for the last time up and down the corridor — "I can trust myself to keep awake."

After a glance at the clock on the wall opposite, he went into Number Four. The sound of the closing door was heard, the sound of the turning lock followed it. Then, the dead silence fell over the house once more.

Little by little, the steward's horror of the stillness and the darkness overcame his dread of moving the handkerchief. He cautiously drew aside one corner of it — waited — looked — and took courage at last to draw the whole handkerchief through the wires of the grating. After first hiding it in his pocket, he thought of the consequences if it was found on him, and threw it down in a corner of the room. He trembled when he had cast it from him, as he looked at his watch, and placed himself again at the grating to wait for Miss Gwilt.

"It was a quarter to one. The moon had come round from the side to the front of the Sanatorium. From time to time her light gleamed on the window of the corridor, when the gaps in the flying clouds let it through. The wind had risen, and sung its mournful song faintly, as it swept at intervals over the desert ground in front of the house.

The minute-hand of the clock travelled on half-way round the circle of the dial. As it touched the quarter-past one, Miss Gwilt stepped noiselessly into the corridor. "Let yourself out," she whispered through the grating, "and follow me." She returned to the stairs by which she had just descended; pushed the door to softly, after Mr. Bashwood had followed her; and led

the way up to the landing of the second-floor. There she put the question to him which she had not ventured to put below stairs."

"Was Mr. Armadale shown into Number Four?" she asked.

He bowed his head without speaking.

"Answer me in words. Has Mr. Armadale left the room since?"

He answered, "No."

"Have you never lost sight of Number Four since I left you?"

He answered, "*Never.*"

Something strange in his manner, something unfamiliar in his voice, as he made that last reply, attracted her attention. She took her candle from a table near, on which she had left it, and threw its light on him. His eyes were staring, his teeth chattered. There was everything to betray him to her as a terrified man — there was nothing to tell her that the terror was caused by his consciousness of deceiving her, for the first time in his life, to her face. If she had threatened him less openly when she placed him on the watch; if she had spoken less unreservedly of the interview which was to reward him in the morning, he might have owned the truth. As it was, his strongest fears and his dearest hopes were alike interested in telling her the fatal lie that he had now told — the fatal lie which he reiterated when she put her question for the second time.

She looked at him, deceived by the last man on earth whom she would have suspected of deception — the man whom she had deceived herself.

"You seem to be over-excited," she said quietly.

"The night has been too much for you. Go upstairs, and rest. You will find the door of one of the rooms left open. That is the room you are to occupy. Good night."

She put the candle (which she had left burning for him) on the table, and gave him her hand. He held her back by it desperately as she turned to leave him. His horror of what might happen when she was left by herself, forced the words to his lips which he would have feared to speak to her at any other time.

"Don't," he pleaded in a whisper; "oh, don't, don't, don't go down-stairs to-night!"

She released her hand, and signed to him to take the candle. "You shall see me to-morrow," she said. "Not a word more now!"

Her stronger will conquered him at that last moment, as it had conquered him throughout. He took the candle, and waited — following her eagerly with his eyes as she descended the stairs. The cold of the December night seemed to have found its way to her through the warmth of the house. She had put on a long heavy black shawl, and had fastened it close over her breast. The plaited coronet in which she wore her hair seemed to have weighed too heavily on her head. She had untwisted it, and thrown it back over her shoulders. The old man looked at her flowing hair, as it lay red over the black shawl — at her supple, long-fingered hand, as it slid down the banisters — at the smooth, seductive grace of every movement that took her farther and farther away from him. "The night will go quickly," he said to himself as she passed from his view; "I shall dream of her till the morning comes!"

She secured the staircase door, after she had passed through it — listened, and satisfied herself that nothing was stirring — then went on slowly along the corridor to the window. Leaning on the window-still, she looked out at the night. The clouds were over the moon at that moment; nothing was to be seen through the darkness but the scattered gaslights in the suburb. Turning from the window, she looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past one.

For the last time, the resolution that had come to her in the earlier night, with the knowledge that her husband was in the house, forced itself uppermost in her mind. For the last time, the voice within her said, "Think if there is no other way!"

She pondered over it till the minute-hand of the clock pointed to the half-hour. "No!" she said, still thinking of the husband. "The one chance left, is to go through with it to the end. He will leave the thing undone which he has come here to do; he will leave the words unspoken which he has come here to say — when he knows that the act may make me a public scandal, and that the words may send me to the scaffold!" Her colour rose, and she smiled with a terrible irony as she looked for the first time at the door of the Room. "I shall be your widow," she said, "in half-an-hour!"

She opened the case of the apparatus, and took the Purple Flask in her hand. After marking the time by a glance at the clock, she dropped into the glass funnel the first of the six separate Pourings that were measured for her by the paper slips.

When she had put the Flask back, she listened at

the mouth of the funnel. Not a sound reached her ear: the deadly process did its work, in the silence of death itself. When she rose, and looked up, the moon was shining in at the window, and the moaning wind was quiet.

Oh, the time! the time! If it could only have been begun and ended with the first Pouring!

She went downstairs into the hall — she walked to and fro, and listened at the open door that led to the kitchen stairs. She came up again; she went down again. The first of the intervals of five minutes was endless. The time stood still. The suspense was maddening.

The interval passed. As she took the Flask for the second time, and dropped in the second Pouring, the clouds floated over the moon, and the night-view through the window slowly darkened.

The restlessness that had driven her up and down the stairs, and backwards and forwards in the hall, left her as suddenly as it had come. She waited through the second interval, leaning on the window-sill, and staring, without conscious thought of any kind, into the black night. The howling of a belated dog was borne towards her on the wind, at intervals, from some distant part of the suburb. She found herself following the faint sound as it died away into silence with a dull attention, and listening for its coming again with an expectation that was duller still. Her arms lay like lead on the window-sill; her forehead rested against the glass without feeling the cold. It was not till the moon struggled out again that she was startled into sudden self-remembrance. She turned quickly, and

looked at the clock; seven minutes had passed since the second Pouring.

As she snatched up the Flask, and fed the funnel for the third time, the full consciousness of her position came back to her. The fever-heat throbbed again in her blood, and flushed fiercely in her cheeks. Swift, smooth, and noiseless, she paced from end to end of the corridor, with her arms folded in her shawl, and her eye moment after moment on the clock.

Three out of the next five minutes passed, and again the suspense began to madden her. The space in the corridor grew too confined for the illimitable restlessness that possessed her limbs. She went down into the hall again, and circled round and round it like a wild creature in a cage. At the third turn, she felt something moving softly against her dress. The house-cat had come up through the open kitchen-door — a large, tawny, companionable cat that purred in high good temper, and followed her for company. She took the animal up in her arms — it rubbed its sleek head luxuriously against her chin as she bent her face over it. "Armadale hates cats," she whispered in the creature's ear. "Come up and see Armadale killed!" The next moment her own frightful fancy horrified her. She dropped the cat with a shudder; she drove it below again with threatening hands. For a moment after, she stood still — then, in headlong haste, suddenly mounted the stairs. Her husband had forced his way back again into her thoughts; her husband threatened her with a danger which had never entered her mind till now. What, if he were not asleep? What if he came out upon her, and found her with the Purple Flask in her hand?

She stole to the door of number three, and listened. The slow, regular breathing of a sleeping man was just audible. After waiting a moment to let the feeling of relief quiet her, she took a step towards Number Four — and checked herself. It was needless to listen at *that* door. The doctor had told her that Sleep came first, as certainly as Death afterwards, in the poisoned air. She looked aside at the clock. The time had come for the fourth Pouring.

Her hand began to tremble violently, as she fed the funnel for the fourth time. The fear of her husband was back again in her heart. What if some noise disturbed him before the sixth Pouring? What if he woke on a sudden (as she had often seen him wake) without any noise at all?

She looked up and down the corridor. The end room, in which Mr. Bashwood had been concealed, offered itself to her as a place of refuge. "I might go in there!" she thought. "Has he left the key?" She opened the door to look, and saw the handkerchief thrown down on the floor. Was it Mr. Bashwood's handkerchief, left there by accident? She examined it at the corners. In the second corner she found her husband's name!

Her first impulse hurried her to the staircase-door, to rouse the steward, and insist on an explanation. The next moment, she remembered the Purple Flask, and the danger of leaving the corridor. She turned, and looked at the door of number three. Her husband, on the evidence of the handcherchief, had unquestionably been out of his room — and Mr. Bashwood had not told her. Was he in his room now? In the violence of her agitation, as the question passed through her

mind, she forgot the discovery which she had herself made not a minute before. Again, she listened at the door; again, she heard the slow regular breathing of of the sleeping man. The first time, the evidence of her ears had been enough to quiet her. *This* time, in the tenfold aggravation of her suspicion and her alarm, she was determined to have the evidence of her eyes as well. "All the doors open softly in this house," she said to herself; "there's no fear of my waking him." Noiselessly, by an inch at a time, she opened the unlocked door, and looked in the moment the aperture was wide enough. In the little light she had let into the room, the sleeper's head was just visible on the pillow. Was it quite as dark against the white pillow as her husband's head looked when he was in bed? Was the breathing as light as her husband's breathing when he was asleep?

She opened the door more widely, and looked in by the clearer light.

There lay the man whose life she had attempted for the third time, peacefully sleeping in the room that had been given to her husband, and in the air that could harm nobody!

The inevitable conclusion overwhelmed her on the instant. With a frantic upward action of her hands she staggered back into the passage. The door of Allan's room fell to — but not noisily enough to wake him. She turned as she heard it close. For one moment she stood staring at it like a woman stupefied. The next, her instinct rushed into action, before her reason recovered itself. In two steps she was at the door of Number Four.

The door was locked.

She felt over the wall with both hands, wildly and clumsily, for the button which she had seen the doctor press, when he was showing the room to the visitors. Twice she missed it. The third time her eyes helped her hands — she found the button and pressed on it. The mortice of the lock inside fell back, and the door yielded to her.

Without an instant's hesitation she entered the room. Though the door was open — though so short a time had elapsed since the fourth Pouring, that but little more than half the contemplated volume of gas had been produced as yet — the poisoned air seized her, like the grasp of a hand at her throat, like the twisting of a wire round her head. She found him on the floor at the foot of the bed — his head and one arm were towards the door, as if he had risen under the first feeling of drowsiness, and had sunk in the effort to leave the room. With the desperate concentration of strength of which women are capable in emergencies, she lifted him and dragged him out into the corridor. Her brain reeled as she laid him down and crawled back on her knees to the room, to shut out the poisoned air from pursuing them into the passage. After closing the door, she waited, without daring to look at him the while, for strength enough to rise and get to the window over the stairs. When the window was opened, when the keen air of the early winter morning blew steadily in, she ventured back to him and raised his head, and looked for the first time closely at his face.

Was it death that spread the livid pallor over his forehead and his cheeks, and the dull leaden hue on his eyelids and his lips?

She loosened his cravat and opened his waistcoat, and bared his throat and breast to the air. With her hand on his heart, with her bosom supporting his head, so that he fronted the window, she waited the event. A time passed: a time short enough to be reckoned by minutes on the clock; and yet long enough to take her memory back over all her married life with him — long enough to mature the resolution that now rose in her mind as the one result that could come of the retrospect. As her eyes rested on him, a strange composure settled slowly on her face. She bore the look of a woman who was equally resigned to welcome the chance of his recovery, or to accept the certainty of his death.

Not a cry or a tear had escaped her yet. Not a cry or a tear escaped her when the interval had passed, and she felt the first faint fluttering of his heart, and heard the first faint catching of the breath at his lips. She silently bent over him and kissed his forehead. When she looked up again, the hard despair had melted from her face. There was something softly radiant in her eyes, which lit her whole countenance as with an inner light, and made her womanly and lovely once more.

She laid him down, and, taking off her shawl, made a pillow of it to support his head. "It might have been hard, love," she said, as she felt the faint pulsation strengthening at his heart. "You have made it easy now."

She rose, and, turning from him, noticed the Purple Flask in the place where she had left it since the fourth Pouring. "Ah," she thought quietly, "I had forgotten

my best friend — I had forgotten that there is more to pour in yet."

With a steady hand, with a calm, attentive face, she fed the funnel for the fifth time. "Five minutes more," she said, when she had put the Flask back, after a look at the clock.

She fell into thought — thought that only deepened the grave and gentle composure of her face. "Shall I write him a farewell word?" she asked herself. "Shall I tell him the truth before I leave him for ever?"

Her little gold pencil-case hung with the other toys at her watch-chain. After looking about her for a moment, she knelt over her husband and put her hand into the breast-pocket of his coat.

His pocket-book was there. Some papers fell from it as she unfastened the clasp. One of them was the letter which had come to him from Mr. Brock's deathbed. She turned over the two sheets of note-paper on which the rector had written the words that had now come true — and found the last page of the last sheet a blank. On that page she wrote her farewell words, kneeling at her husband's side.

"I am worse than the worst you can think of me. You have saved Armadale by changing rooms with him to-night — and you have saved him from Me. You can guess now whose widow I should have claimed to be, if you had not preserved his life; and you will know what a wretch you married when you married the woman who writes these lines. Still, I had some innocent moments — and then I loved you dearly. Forget me, my darling, in the love of a better woman than I am. I might, perhaps, have been that better woman myself, if I had not lived a miserable life be-

fore you met with me. It matters little now. The one atonement I can make for all the wrong I have done you is the atonement of my death. It is not hard for me to die, now I know you will live. Even my wickedness has one merit — it has not prospered. I have never been a happy woman."

She folded the letter again, and put it into his hand, to attract his attention in that way when he came to himself. As she gently closed his fingers on the paper and looked up, the last minute of the last interval faced her, recorded on the clock.

She bent over him, and gave him her farewell kiss.

"Live, my angel, live!" she murmured tenderly, with her lips just touching his. "All your life is before you — a happy life, and an honoured life, if you are freed from *me!*"

With a last, lingering tenderness, she parted the hair back from his forehead. "It is no merit to have loved you," she said. "You are one of the men whom women all like." She sighed and left him. It was her last weakness. She bent her head affirmatively to the clock, as if it had been a living creature speaking to her — and fed the funnel for the last time, to the last drop left in the Flask.

The waning moon shone in faintly at the window. With her hand on the door of the room, she turned and looked at the light that was slowly fading out of the murky sky.

"Oh, God, forgive me!" she said. "Oh, Christ, bear witness that I have suffered!"

One moment more she lingered on the threshold;

lingered for her last look in this world — and turned that look on *him*.

"Good-by!" she said softly.

The door of the room opened — and closed on her. There was an interval of silence.

Then, a sound came dull and sudden, like the sound of a fall.

Then, there was silence again.

* * * * *

The hands of the clock, following their steady course, reckoned the minutes of the morning as one by one they lapsed away. It was the tenth minute since the door of the room had opened and closed, before Midwinter stirred on his pillow, and, struggling to raise himself, felt the letter in his hand.

At the same moment, a key was turned in the staircase-door. And the doctor, looking expectantly towards the fatal room, saw the Purple Flask on the window-sill, and the prostrate man trying to raise himself from the floor.

THE END OF THE LAST BOOK.

EPILOGUE.

CHAPTER I.

News from Norfolk.

From Mr. Pedgift Senior (Thorpe-Ambrose), to Mr. Pedgift Junior (Paris).

"High Street, December 20th.

"My dear Augustus,

"Your letter reached me yesterday. You seem to be making the most of your youth (as you call it) with a vengeance. Well! enjoy your holiday. I made the most of my youth, when I was your age; and, wonderful to relate, I haven't forgotten it yet!

"You ask me for a good budget of news, and especially, for more information about that mysterious business at the Sanatorium.

"Curiosity, my dear boy, is a quality, which (in our profession especially) sometimes leads to great results. I doubt, however, if you will find it leading to much on this occasion. All I know of the mystery at the Sanatorium, I know from Mr. Armadale; and he is entirely in the dark on more than one point of importance. I have already told you how they were entrapped into the house, and how they passed the night there. To this I can now add that something did certainly happen to Mr. Midwinter, which deprived

him of consciousness; and that the doctor, who appears to have been mixed up in the matter, carried things with a high hand, and insisted on taking his own course in his own Sanatorium. There is not the least doubt that the miserable woman (however she might have come by her death) was found dead — that a coroner's inquest inquired into the circumstances — that the evidence showed her to have entered the house as a patient — and that the medical investigation ended in discovering that she had died of apoplexy. My idea is, that Mr. Midwinter had a motive of his own for not coming forward with the evidence that he might have given. I have also reason to suspect that Mr. Armadale, out of regard for him, followed his lead, and that the verdict at the inquest (attaching no blame to anybody), proceeded, like many other verdicts of the same kind, from an entirely superfical investigation of the circumstances.

The key to the whole mystery is to be found, I firmly believe, in that wretched woman's attempt to personate the character of Mr. Armadale's widow, when the news of his death appeared in the papers. But what first set her on this, and by what inconceivable process of deception, she can have induced Mr. Midwinter to marry her (as the certificate proves), under Mr. Armadale's name, is more than Mr. Armadale himself knows. The point was not touched at the inquest, for the simple reason that the inquest only concerned itself with the circumstances attending her death. Mr. Armadale, at his friend's request, saw Miss Blanchard, and induced her to silence old Darch on the subject of the claim that had been made relating to the widow's income. As the claim had never been

admitted, even our stiff-necked brother practitioner consented for once to do as he was asked. The doctor's statement that his patient was the widow of a gentleman named Armadale, was accordingly left unchallenged, and so the matter has been hushed up. She is buried in the great cemetery, near the place were she died. Nobody but Mr. Midwinter and Mr. Armadale (who insisted on going with him), followed her to the grave; and nothing has been inscribed on the tombstone, but the initial letter of her Christian name, and the date of her death. So, after all the harm she has done, she rests at last — and so the two men whom she has injured have forgiven her.

"Is there more to say on this subject before we leave it? On referring to your letter, I find you have raised one other point, which may be worth a moment's notice.

"You ask if there is reason to suppose that the doctor comes out of the matter with hands which are really as clean as they look? My dear Augustus, I believe the doctor to have been at the bottom of more of this mischief than we shall ever find out; and to have profited by the self-imposed silence of Mr. Midwinter and Mr. Armadale, as rogues perpetually profit by the misfortunes and necessities of honest men. It is an ascertained fact that he connived at the false statement about Miss Milroy, which entrapped the two gentlemen into his house, — and that one circumstance (after my Old Bailey experience) is enough for *me*. As to evidence against him, there is not a jot, — and as to Retribution overtaking him, I can only say I heartily hope Retribution may prove in the long run to be the more cunning customer of the two. There is not

much prospect of it at present. The doctor's friends and admirers are, I understand, about to present him with a Testimonial, 'expressive of their sympathy under the sad occurrence which has thrown a cloud over the opening of his Sanatorium, and of their undiminished confidence in his integrity and ability as a medical man.' We live, Augustus, in an age eminently favourable to the growth of all roguery which is careful enough to keep up appearances. In this enlightened nineteenth century, I look upon the doctor as one of our rising men.

"To turn now to pleasanter subjects than Sanatoriums, I may tell you that Miss Neelie is as good as well again, and is, in my humble opinion, prettier than ever. She is staying in London, under the care of a female relative — and Mr. Armadale satisfies her of the fact of his existence (in case she should forget it) regularly every day. They are to be married in the spring — unless Mrs. Milroy's death causes the ceremony to be postponed. The medical men are of opinion that the poor lady is sinking at last. It may be a question of weeks or a question of months, they can say no more. She is greatly altered — quiet and gentle, and anxiously affectionate with her husband and her child. But, in her case, this happy change is, it seems, a sign of approaching dissolution, from the medical point of view. There is a difficulty in making the poor old major understand this. He only sees that she has gone back to the likeness of her better self when he first married her; and he sits for hours by her bedside, now, and tells her about his wonderful clock.

"Mr. Midwinter, of whom you will next expect me to say something, is improving rapidly. After causing

some anxiety at first to the medical men (who declared that he was suffering from a serious nervous shock, produced by circumstances about which their patient's obstinate silence kept them quite in the dark), he has rallied, as only men of his sensitive temperament (to quote the doctors again) *can* rally. He and Mr. Armadale are together in a quiet lodging. I saw him last week, when I was in London. His face showed signs of wear and tear, very sad to see in so young a man. But he spoke of himself and his future with a courage and hopefulness, which men of twice his years (if he has suffered, as I suspect him to have suffered) might have envied. If I know anything of humanity this is no common man — and we shall hear of him yet in no common way.

"You will wonder how I came to be in London. I went up, with a return ticket (from Saturday to Monday) about that matter in dispute at our agent's. We had a tough fight — but, curiously enough, a point occurred to me just as I got up to go; and I went back to my chair, and settled the question in no time. Of course I stayed at Our Hotel in Covent Garden. William, the waiter, asked after you with the affection of a father; and Matilda, the chambermaid, said you almost persuaded her, that last time, to have the hollow tooth taken out of her lower jaw. I had the agent's second son (the young chap you nicknamed Mustapha, when he made that dreadful mess about the Turkish Securities) to dine with me on Sunday. A little incident happened in the evening which may be worth recording, as it connected itself with a certain old lady, who was not 'at home' when you and Mr. Armadale blundered on that house in Pimlico in the bygone time.

"Mustapha was like all the rest of you young men of the present day — he got restless after dinner. 'Let's go to a public amusement, Mr. Pedgift,' says he. 'Public amusement? Why, it's Sunday evening!' says I. 'All right, sir,' says Mustapha. 'They stop acting on the stage, I grant you, on Sunday evening — but they don't stop acting in the pulpit. Come and see the last new Sunday performer of our time.' As he wouldn't have any more wine, there was nothing else for it, but to go.

"We went to a street at the West End, and found it blocked up with carriages. If it hadn't been Sunday night, I should have thought we were going to the opera. 'What did I tell you?' says Mustapha, taking me up to an open door with a gas star outside and a bill of the performance. I had just time to notice that I was going to one of a series of 'Sunday Evening Discourses on the Pomps and Vanities of the World, by A Sinner Who Has Served Them,' when Mustapha jogged my elbow, and whispered, 'Half-a-crown is the fashionable tip.' I found myself between two demure and silent gentlemen, with plates in their hands, uncommonly well-filled already with the fashionable tip. Mustapha patronized one plate, and I the other. We passed through two doors into a long room, crammed with people. And there, on a platform at the farther end holding forth to the audience, was — not a man as I had expected — but a Woman, and that woman, MOTHER OLDERSHAW! You never listened to anything more eloquent in your life. As long as I heard her she was never once at a loss for a word anywhere. I shall think less of oratory as a human accomplishment, for the rest of my days, after that Sunday evening.

As for the matter of the sermon, I may describe it as a narrative of Mrs. Oldershaw's experience among dilapidated women, profusely illustrated in the pious and penitential style. You will ask what sort of audience it was. Principally women, Augustus — and, as I hope to be saved, all the old harridans of the world of fashion, whom Mother Oldershaw had enamelled in her time, sitting boldly in the front places, with their cheeks ruddled with paint, in a state of devout enjoyment wonderful to see! I left Mustapha to hear the end of it. And I thought to myself, as I went out, of what Shakspeare says somewhere, — 'Lord, what fools we mortals be!'

"Have I anything more to tell you before I leave off? Only one thing that I can remember.

"That wretched old Bashwood has confirmed the fears I told you I had about him, when he was brought back here from London. There is no kind of doubt that he has really lost all the little reason he ever had. He is perfectly harmless, and perfectly happy. And he would do very well, if we could only prevent him from going out in his last new suit of clothes, smirking and smiling, and inviting everybody to his approaching marriage with the handsomest woman in England. It ends of course in the boys pelting him, and in his coming here crying to me, covered with mud. The moment his clothes are cleaned again, he falls back into his favourite delusion, and struts about before the church gates, in the character of a bridegroom, waiting for Miss Gwilt. We must get the poor wretch taken care of somewhere for the rest of the little time he has to live. Who would ever have thought of a man at his age falling in love? and who would ever

have believed that the mischief that woman's beauty has done, could have reached as far in the downward direction as our superannuated old clerk?

"Good-by, for the present, my dear boy. If you see a particularly handsome snuff-box in Paris, remember — though your father scorns Testimonials — he doesn't object to receive a present from his son.

Yours affectionately,

A. PEDGIFT Senr.

"POSTSCRIPT. — I think it likely that the account you mention, in the French papers, of a fatal quarrel among some foreign sailors in one of the Lipari Islands, and of the death of their captain, among others, may really have been a quarrel among the scoundrels who robbed Mr. Armadale, and scuttled his yacht. *Those* fellows, luckily for society, can't always keep up appearances; and, in their case, Rogues and Retribution do occasionally come into collision with each other."

CHAPTER II.

Midwinter.

THE spring had advanced to the end of April. It was the eve of Allan's wedding-day. Midwinter and he had sat talking together at the great house till far into the night — till so far that it had struck twelve long since, and the wedding-day was already some hours old.

For the most part, the conversation had turned on the bridegroom's plans and projects. It was not till the two friends rose to go to rest, that Allan insisted

on making Midwinter speak of himself. "We have had enough, and more than enough, of *my* future," he began, in his bluntly straightforward way. "Let's say something now, Midwinter, about yours. You have promised me, I know, that if you take to Literature, it shan't part us, and that if you go on a sea voyage, you will remember when you come back that my house is your home. But this is the last chance we have of being together in our old way; and I own I should like to know —" His voice faltered, and his eyes moistened a little. He left the sentence unfinished.

Midwinter took his hand and helped him, as he had often helped him to the words that he wanted, in the bygone time.

"You would like to know, Allan," he said, "that I shall not bring an aching heart with me to your wedding-day? If you will let me go back for a moment to the past, I think I can satisfy you."

They took their chairs again. Allan saw that Midwinter was moved. "Why distress yourself?" he asked kindly — "why go back to the past?"

"For two reasons, Allan. I ought to have thanked you long since for the silence you have observed, for my sake, on a matter that must have seemed very strange to you. You know what the name is which appears on the register of my marriage — and yet you have forborne to speak of it, from the fear of distressing me. Before you enter on your new life, let us come to a first and last understanding about this. I ask you — as one more kindness to me — to accept my assurance (strange as the thing must seem to you) that I am blameless in this matter; and I entreat you

to believe that the reasons I have for leaving it unexplained, are reasons which, if Mr. Brock was living, Mr. Brock himself would approve." In those words, he kept the secret of the two names — and left the memory of Allan's mother, what he had found it, a sacred memory in the heart of her son.

"One word more," he went on — "a word which will take us, this time, from past to future. It has been said, and truly said, that out of Evil may come Good. Out of the horror and the misery of that night you know of, has come the silencing of a doubt which once made my life miserable with groundless anxiety about you and about myself. No clouds, raised by my superstition, will ever come between us again. I can't honestly tell you that I am more willing now than I was when we were in the Isle of Man, to take what is called the rational view of your Dream. Though I know what extraordinary coincidences are perpetually happening in the experience of all of us, still I cannot accept coincidences as explaining the fulfilment of the Visions which our own eyes have seen. All I can sincerely say for myself is, what I think it will satisfy you to know, that I have learnt to view the purpose of the Dream with a new mind. I once believed that it was sent to rouse your distrust of the friendless man whom you had taken as a brother to your heart. I now *know* that it came to you as a timely warning to take him closer still. Does this help to satisfy you that I, too, am standing hopefully on the brink of a new life, and that while we live, brother, your love and mine will never be divided again?"

They shook hands in silence. Allan was the first to recover himself. He answered in the few words of

kindly assurance which were the best words that he could address to his friend.

"I have heard all I ever want to hear about the past," he said; "and I know what I most wanted to know about the future. Everybody says, Midwinter, you have a career before you — and I believe that everybody is right. Who knows what great things may happen before you and I are many years older?"

"Who *need* know?" said Midwinter, calmly. "Happen what may, God is all-merciful, God is all-wise. In those words, your dear old friend once wrote to me. In that faith, I can look back without murmuring at the years that are past, and can look on without doubting to the years that are to come."

He rose, and walked to the window. While they had been speaking together, the darkness had passed. The first light of the new day met him as he looked out, and rested tenderly on his face.

THE END.

APPENDIX.

NOTE. — My readers will perceive that I have purposely left them, with reference to the Dream in this story, in the position which they would occupy in the case of a dream in real life — they are free to interpret it by the natural or the supernatural theory, as the bent of their own minds may incline them. Persons disposed to take the rational view may, under these circumstances, be interested in hearing of a coincidence relating to the present story, which actually happened, and which in the matter of "extravagant improbability," sets anything of the same kind that a novelist could image at flat defiance.

In November, 1865,—that is to say, when thirteen monthly parts of "Armadale" had been published; and, I may add, when more than a year and a half had elapsed since the end of the story, as it now appears, was first sketched in my note-book — a vessel lay in the Huskisson Dock, at Liverpool, which was looked after by one man who slept on board, in the capacity of shipkeeper. On a certain day in the week, this man was found dead in the deck-house. On the next day, a second man, who had taken his place, was carried dying to the Northern Hospital. On the third day, a third shipkeeper was appointed, and was found dead in the deck-house which had already proved fatal to the other two. *The name of that ship was "The Armadale."* And the proceedings at the Inquest proved that the three men had been all suffocated *by sleeping in poisoned air!*

I am indebted for these particulars to the kindness of the reporters at Liverpool, who sent me their statement of the facts. The case found its way into most of the newspapers. It was noticed — to give two instances in which I can cite the dates — in *The Times* of November 30th, 1865, and was more fully described in the *Daily News* of November 28th in the same year.

Before taking leave of "Armadale," I may perhaps be allowed to mention for the benefit of any readers who may be curious on such points, that the "Norfolk Broads" are here described after personal investigation of them. In this, as in other cases, I have spared no pains to instruct myself on matters of fact. Wherever the story touches on questions connected with Law, Medicine, or Chemistry, it has been submitted, before publication, to the experience of professional men. The kindness of a friend supplied me with a plan of the Doctor's Apparatus — and I saw the chemical ingredients at work, before I ventured on describing the action of them in the closing scenes of this book.

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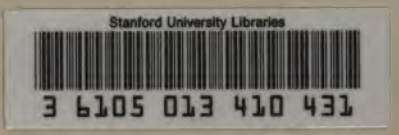

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